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Illustrations **Toon53 Productions**

Motoring Editor **John Page**

Senior Photo Editor **Luba V Nel**

ADVERTISING SALES **pieter@dhsmedia.co.za**

for more information

PHONE: +27 10 006 0051
MAIL: PO Box 71450, Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2021
ADDRESS: First Floor Block 6 Fourways Office Park, Cnr Roos Street & Fourways Boulevard, 2191
EMAIL: info@dhsmedia.co.za
WEB: www.playboymagaustralia.com
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/Playboy-Australia
INSTAGRAM: playboy_australia

PLAYBOY INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING
Allison Kopcha, Chief Business Development & Licensing
Hazel Thomson, Senior Director, International Licensing

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PLAYBOY

Comedian Ali Wong Changes Perceptions, Diapers

The groundbreaking comedian and 'Fresh Off the Boat' writer tells us about life after her smash stand-up special 'Baby Cobra'

BY **JAMIE LOFTUS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**

Ali Wong wanted it all (career, relationship, baby), got it all and mined every last minute of it in the process. The comedian currently juggles her mom duties, her day gig as a writer on acclaimed sitcom Fresh Off the Boat and her thriving stand-up career—while taking every conventional rule of comedy and bending it to her liking.

Wong's Netflix special, Baby Cobra, filmed when she was more than seven months pregnant, is truly hilarious and groundbreaking. Now, as a new mother, she's on another mission: speaking openly about finding a balance between her hormones' command to stay home with her daughter and her professional need to stick to the comedy grind. The good news? Whatever she's doing, it's working.

And while the crowds may be growing exponentially, the objective of an Ali Wong show has always been the same. "I want people to laugh to the point that they can't think."

PLAYBOY: What's the biggest challenge you face as a comedian right now?

WONG: Finding time to hone my new jokes, while spending as much time with my daughter as possible, has been challenging. I can't travel frequently to perform, or go anywhere far, or for very long.

PLAYBOY: How are these challenges different from the ones you had five years ago?

WONG: I said yes to every single stand-up gig offer before. But traveling to some of these places to perform was often so lonely. I'd feel so isolated during the day and miss sleeping in my own bed so much. Now when I'm on the road, the accommodations are a lot nicer and I savor my time alone. But I'm also constantly thinking about my family and getting back to them.

PLAYBOY: Have you received a lot of internet backlash through the years?

WONG: I don't spend much time on social media. Especially now that I have a baby, I can't be ignoring her for the sake of reading all these "mentions." I also just accept that I'm not for everybody.

PLAYBOY: Was there a time where you tried to play by the typical "rules" of being a comedian? When did you realize you wanted something different?

WONG: I've always wanted to be a household name as a stand-up comic and also be a mother. And I always knew that I wanted both so bad that I was not going to accept that they were mutually exclusive. After I gave birth to my daughter, it would have been really easy to dive into motherhood 100 percent and take a big step back from stand-up comedy. My hormones were commanding me to. But all of the momentum from Baby Cobra has bred all of these amazing new opportunities that I just can't say no to.

PLAYBOY: What has surprised you the most about the response to Baby Cobra?

WONG: I didn't anticipate how much of a game changer it would be. Last year in San Francisco, before Baby Cobra, they had to put some of my tickets at this 400-seat venue, where I was performing four shows, on Groupon because I couldn't sell all of the seats. Now this year, at that same venue, tickets for five shows sold out in less than one minute, six months prior to the show dates. Also, I just can't get over what my hero Bill Burr has had to say about Baby Cobra. That he even watched it pretty much made my year.

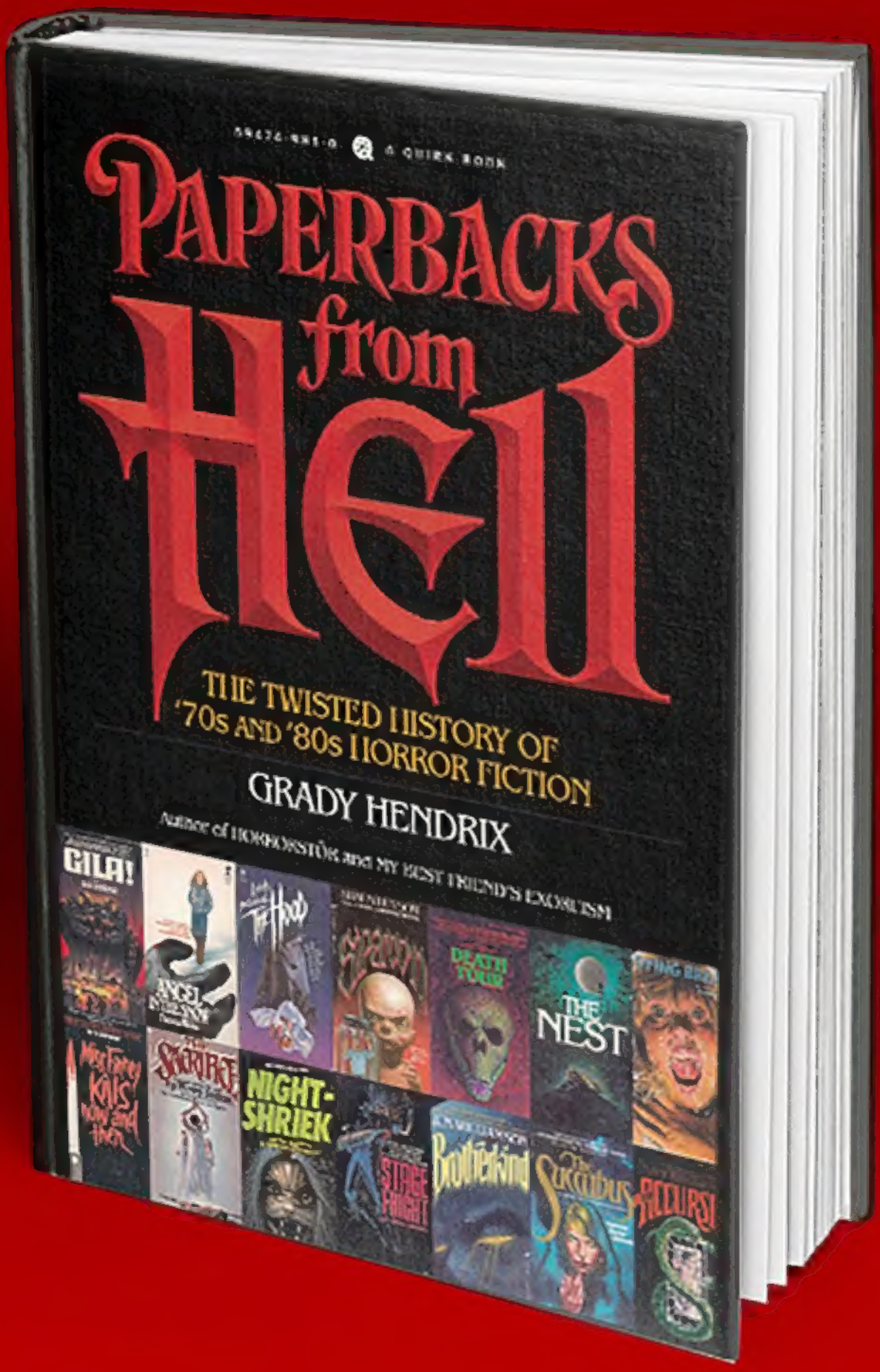
PLAYBOY: What would you like to see more of in comedy?

WONG: Well, specifically in TV, I would like to see more female showrunners. In comedy, there's no tougher and more influential job than a TV showrunner. They make all of the most important creative decisions for TV, which is continues to be such an exciting medium. But for the few female showrunners who are out there, I'm just obsessed and in awe of them. I bow down to Jill Solloway (Transparent), Jenji Kohan (Orange is the New Black), Tina Fey (Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt), Nahnatchka Khan (Fresh Off the Boat), Marti Noxon (UnReal) and Pam Brady (Lady Dynamite). They have created and are driving some of the most funny and groundbreaking television right now.

PLAYBOY: What do you want people to take away from an Ali Wong show?

WONG: I want people to laugh to the point where they can't think. When people come see me live, I want them to not even remember what really happened or what I said because they were too busy having joy overcome their body.

PLAYBOY's 2016 Renegades: The men and women in this series will change how you think about business, music, porn, comedy, gaming and more. They've risked it all—even their lives—to do what they love, showing us what can be accomplished if we break the rules. Meet the Renegades: Paul Beatty, Ali Wong, Laura Jane Grace, Sean Murray, Noor Tagouri, Stoya and Jason Dill.


A QUIRK BOOK
PAPERBACKS from HELL
THE TWISTED HISTORY OF '70s AND '80s HORROR FICTION
GRADY HENDRIX
Author of HORRORSTÖR and MY BEST FRIEND'S EXORCISM
GILA!
THE NEST
NIGHT-SHRIEK
Brotherkind
The Succubus
REDBURST

A Glimpse Into Hell:

Talking With Horror Historian Grady Hendrix

From abductor aliens to man-eating rabbits to evil Nazi leprechauns, you've got to check out this amazing horror guide

GIL MACIAS

QUIRK BOOKS

Horror novel fans are in for a nostalgic treat when they pick up Paperbacks From Hell, a new book by Grady Hendrix that thoroughly examines the 1970s and 1980s explosion of horror fiction. An aficionado of the genre and author of novels Horrorstör and My Best Friend's Exorcism, Hendrix provides fascinating backstories for the era's delightfully twisted and often demented books. The many talented artists who helped make library and bookstore shelves far more eye-catching—with sexy, gruesome and sometimes hilarious cover illustrations—also get their due. Sure, the 1990s had R.L. Stine's Goosebumps series, but those kid-friendly books were child's play compared with the pulp-publishing madness that the 1970s and 1980s delivered. One particularly memorable paperback that Hendrix looks at is John Christopher's The Little People, which stars whip-swinging devilish Nazi leprechauns. Alien pregnancies, sex-crazed demons, man-eating animals and insects—you name it, the 1970s and 1980s horror section had it. Hendrix writes about it all in spectacular detail, accompanied by sensational imagery. Paperbacks From Hell includes hundreds of full-color covers and illustrations.

Some of these old horror-fiction gems were published by the now-defunct Playboy Press. In 1976, Hendrix writes, Playboy Press "began targeting female readers with horror novels and bodice rippers." For an exclusive look at some of these old Playboy Press book covers, check out the 12 covers included below.

We caught up with Hendrix and talked to him about his favorite horror novel art, which books he'd like to see translated to film and why you should always judge a book by its cover.

PLAYBOY: There's that old saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover." Do horror book covers from the 1970s and 1980s make it hard to follow that rule?

HENDRIX: "Don't judge a book by its cover" is supposed to apply only to serial killers—as in "We were getting married in three weeks and then the police dug up his backyard. Oh well, don't judge a book by its cover." Books should 100 percent be judged by their covers, and the fact that this advice has been misapplied to books accounts for the drastic decline in the awesomeness of book covers since the early 1990s.

PLAYBOY: You describe H.W. Hocherman's The Gilgul as not living up to the promise of its cover. Out of all the books you include in Paperbacks From Hell, which has the best cover, but worst story?

HENDRIX: Whoa, whoa, whoa. The Gilgul cover features a one-of-a-kind sculpted screaming lizard-faced bride by artist Jim Thiesen—so unless the book inside was The Great Gatsby, there's no way anything could live up to it. And The Gilgul features said bride spraying black breast milk, so it has its own charms. Probably the one book that didn't deliver for me is The Christmas Babies, which promises evil Yuletide infants on the cover and then doesn't even take place at Christmas. Silent tears slid down my face while I read that one.

PLAYBOY: What's your favorite book-cover art of all time?

HENDRIX: You have to approach this from two directions. For sheer, jaw-dropping majesty, it doesn't get any better than illustrator Hector Garrido's Nazi leprechauns spilling out of an Irish castle on the cover of The Little People. For technical prowess, I'd have to go with Jeffrey Catherine Jones's

The Closed Circle, **1976**; The Transformation, **1976**; The Haven, **1976**

The Hunters, **1978**; The Sibling, **1979**; Mind War, **1979**

covers for The Guardians series, which are beautiful pieces that look like Frank Frazetta doing art nouveau.

PLAYBOY: Out of all the talented artists mentioned in the book, do you have a favorite?

HENDRIX: It's hard to pick, but there is no arguing the fact that William Teason should be considered one of America's great illustrators, yet the guy doesn't even have a Wikipedia page. And George Ziel's covers, cloaked in a suffocating Gothic miasma, are drop-dead gorgeous.

PLAYBOY: What horror book from the 1970s or 1980s would you like to see translated to the big screen?

HENDRIX: I really want to see Pixar tackle William W. Johnstone's Toy Cemetery. They did so well with the Toy Story movies that I feel like it would be just one small step for them to make Toy Cemetery and bring Johnstone's world of ghost-werewolf sex, clashing armies of insane toys, a town held hostage by heavy metal music and the bestial products of incest—and his unholy obsession with anal violation—to the big screen. I don't know about you, but that spells "summer blockbuster" to me.

PLAYBOY: VHS art from the 1980s has plenty of parallels to book art of the same time. Have you considered doing a book on VHS horror covers?

HENDRIX: I'd love to, but it's been done really well by Tom Hodge.

PLAYBOY: Your knowledge of horror fiction seems so comprehensive, it gives the impression that you live in a museum filled with hundreds of books and posters. Is that correct?

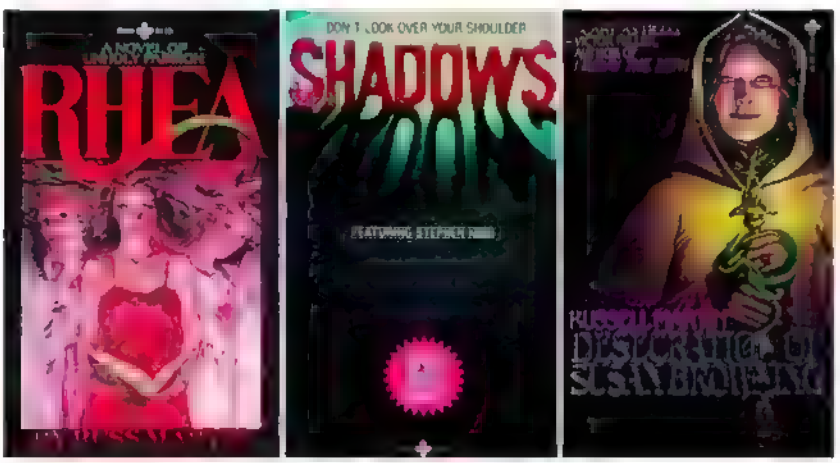
HENDRIX: If by "museum" you mean a tiny hovel bulging with moldering mass-market paperbacks that rise up over my head in tottering towers that threaten to crush me if I make the slightest misstep or any sudden moves, then yes. I live in a museum.

PLAYBOY: Is nostalgia for old horror tales partly responsible for the resurgence of 1980s-flavored pop culture creations such as Stranger Things?**

HENDRIX: Absolutely. These books leapt off drugstore racks and stabbed us in the brain at an early age, inspiring a generation of writers, and filmmakers, and graphic designers. These covers were our primal traumas and the stuff of our earliest nightmares. Pick a word—"influenced," "haunted," "scarred"—they did all that to us and more. And we loved it.

PLAYBOY: You've described illustrated covers like the ones featured in Paperbacks From Hell as part of a dying art. Are there any current artists you'd like to give a shout out to who are keeping this old-school style alive?

HENDRIX: A lot of the original artists are still working—Jill Bauman, Les Edwards, Lisa Falkenstern, Tom Hallman. The artists didn't go away, the books did. But there are also younger artists; Marc Schoenbach does poster art in this style, and it looks amazing. I'm not sure why he doesn't get more work.



Rhea, **1980**; Shadows, **1980**; The Desecration of Susan Browning, **1981**

The Woman Next Door, **1981**; Nursery Tale, **1982**; The Shaman, **1982**

Sally Le

We're happy to have you featured. Can you give us a bit of background on your career as a model and where it all started? I am so happy and honored to be featured in Playboy as it has always been one of my many goals. I started taking pictures for fun when i was about 17 and really enjoyed getting glammed and feel ng pretty Over time, I started to take more pictures and work with different photographers and models, and opportunities just started to come my way. I have met some amazing people in the industry along the way and just sort of went with the flow and fast forward to today, and I am now being featured in PlayBoy

How do you usually begin your day? I usually begin my day silencing and snoozing about 10 alarms, and when I'm finally up I have to eat a nice breakfast pa red with a decent-sized cup of coffee.

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would it be and why? I would love to be in a nice property anywhere by the beach or scenic area with my loved ones, I enjoy spend ng quality time in amazing places with the people I love most whilst exploring new places.

What are your favorite ways to unwind and relax when you're not working or traveling? It would be to stay in my house and watch horror movies in my pajamas with my phone on DND. I am a homebody, I like to spend time at home in peace when I'm not working or busy with life.

Do you have any hidden talent, if so what is it? I do not possess any special hidden talents, but I've been told by several people that am a natural comedian.

What's the best place you have ever been to in the world? I haven't had much time to trave but the best place I've been to so far was Taiwan

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I hope to be able to continue my educat on and obtain my degree as a Nurse practitioner, travel more with my son, and live a happy and peaceful life

3 things that you can't go a day without. I am grateful for all my blessings, snacks, and lipgloss Looking back.

Looking back, what advice would you give to younger yourself? I would've told my younger self to be more confident and to instant y pursue any goals/dreams instead of waiting for the "right time" but things happen for a reason and everything fell into place

That said, what advice would you give to all the women out there when it comes to love and relationships? P ease love yourself first. No one will love you the way you love yourself Do things that make you happy and never compromise yourself and your goals in ..fe to satisfy anyone. The right person will come into your ife and will love you exactly the way you are and every aspect of your life

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner and what do you value the most? I value a kind and empathetic person with morals and disc p ine In such a materialistic and superficial world, those qual ties are hard to find

Thanks so much for your time, Where can our readers follow you on social to stay up to date on what you're up to? My only soc al media account is Instagram @viletmamii

Virtual Satisfaction

VR porn is the latest offspring of a lucrative, centuries-old marriage between tech and erotica. Playboy travels to a Beverly Hills mansion for a behind-the-scenes look at the most titillating content feeding the R515.00 billion VR industry machine

BY JESSICA P. OGILVIE

Christie Stevens is on her knees, gazing up at Isiah Maxwell, her mouth agape. Her breasts bounce with every bob of her head, and her platinum blonde hair cascades down her pale back, grazing the top of her sacrum tattoo.

"My husband," she says, grasping Maxwell's large manhood with both hands and looking directly into his brown eyes, "would never do this."

A dozen or so men stand around watching this scene in various states of discomfort. Three are journalists, and this is the best day of their lives. Two are tech entrepreneurs, tentatively exploring the pornography industry as a means of financing their VR start-up. The rest are adult-industry insiders, and this is just another day on the job.

Today's shoot, hosted by the adult-video company BaDoink, looks fairly standard as porn shoots go. Stevens wanders around the sparsely furnished modern five-story Beverly Hills mansion in thigh-high stockings and a sheer bra, her makeup artist providing the occasional touch-up. The 30-year-old, five-foot-two actress works on her lines, in this film, she plays a bored housewife who sexually accosts an unsuspecting door-to-door vacuum salesman.

But the shoot marks a turning point for porn and for technology at large, it's being filmed for virtual reality, the hardware for which hit shelves en masse in 2016. Stevens has been working in porn for five years and has performed in upward of 250 productions. But this is the first she's done for virtual reality. And while she doesn't yet know what's in store for her today, the premise for you, the consumer, is clear: Stevens isn't fucking Maxwell. She's fucking you.

Plenty of point-of-view scenes have been shot in modern pornography. In most of them, a male actor films a woman as they have sex. The man's face rarely appears, so the footage approximates what the viewer would see if he were having sex with the woman himself.

Virtual-reality porn takes this concept to a new level by not only breaking the fourth wall but demolishing it altogether. When you strap on a virtual-reality headset, your physical world disappears. Instead of watching a computer screen, you're transported to the room the actress is in. Your hands aren't encumbered by a keyboard or a mouse. You're no longer simply observing the fantasy, you're inside it.

This new level of erotic escapism, many experts believe, heralds the future of porn and, by extension, the future of technology itself.

Pornography has a storied history as technology's inadvertent harbinger. According to tech experts and porn insiders, when a new device makes porn more accessible, that pornographic content helps usher the device onto the market.

"People who are willing to pay for porn popularize the technology," says Jonathan Coopersmith, a technology historian at Texas A&M University. "That drives down the price."

This wisdom comes from the commonsense notion that people are biologically predisposed to look at erotic images. To get a sense of just how far back this hardwiring goes, we can turn to our trusty Neanderthal predecessors. Their cave renderings can be interpreted in only one way, says Bryant Paul, a faculty affiliate at the Kinsey Institute. They were "just vulvas," he says. Cavemen were "getting off on that."

The practice of sketching women's naked bodies carried on for millennia, as evidenced by a quick lap around any fine arts museum. Then, in 1839, the first practical photographic process—the daguerreotype—was invented. Within seven years, Victorian pornographers had created the world's first adult-themed photograph. That pattern repeated with the invention of the motion picture camera in 1889, seven years later, the first pornographic film was shot: Le Coucher de la Mariee, featuring cabaret performer Louise Willy doing a striptease in her bedroom.

When the VHS and home entertainment center hit U.S. shelves in 1977, porn watching was again upended as people realized they could screen adult films at home. By the end of the decade, adult videos accounted for more than half of all prerecorded tapes sold in the U.S.

"The introduction of the VCR and playback," says Frederick Lane, author of Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age, "was the most fundamental shift in the consumption of pornography in human history."

It is unsurprising, then, that when the internet arrived for the masses in the 1990s, all hell broke loose. Like their forefathers, consumers almost immediately put the new technology to use to watch people having sex. Pornographers, meanwhile, had content that was easily repurposed. Preexisting footage could be cut, edited and sold to websites.

Internet porn quickly became the first industry to profit from online sales. According to a report by the National Research Council, in 2001 the online adult industry in the U.S. generated about R18 00 billion, by 2013, all porn sites had more visitors than Netflix, Amazon and Twitter combined.

Then, in 2016, came virtual reality.

Virtual reality as we have come to know it began in 2012 when 19-year-old Palmer Luckey launched a Kickstarter for what would become the world's first consumer-friendly, commercially successful VR headset: Oculus Rift. Luckey created Oculus with gamers in mind, but after his device was shown at 2012's E3 conference, he was flooded with offers from major tech investors. His Kickstarter raised $2.4 million. In 2014, Mark Zuckerberg bought Luckey's company, Oculus VR, for R35 00 billion.

Modern virtual-reality content is little more than 180- and 360-degree images repurposed,

VR porn not only breaks the fourth wall but demolishes it. You're no longer observing the fantasy; you're inside it.

the same technology is used by Google Maps. In addition to Oculus and Google, the top players bringing these images to consumers via new viewing devices are Sony, Samsung and HTC Vive. Adult-entertainment companies investing heavily in VR pornographic content include BaDoink, Naughty America, VirtualRealPorn, Czech VR and VR Bangers.

These companies—and some of the guests at today's shoot—face two primary hurdles: figuring out what kind of VR content consumers want and determining how best to shoot that content.

Sam Burton owns Holotrope VR, which he co-founded to develop new techniques for shooting VR. He comes from a film and television background, but his start-up operates in relatively unknown territory, so money isn't yet pouring in from risk-averse mainstream businesses.

"The companies we normally work with aren't really committing budgets," he says. "The adult industry is starting to spend money. Not to boil it down to just dollars, but we are a start-up."

So when Burton received BaDoink's request to film today's shoot, "it seemed like a good opportunity to bring in money for research and development, and to shoot in large volume," he says.

And that's how he found himself in this Beverly Hills home, doing his best to remain unobtrusive as Stevens walks around the house topless. To film her scene with Maxwell, Burton has brought two different camera setups. One includes multiple GoPro cameras configured in a 360-degree rig. The other involves two cameras with fish-eye lenses, the 180-degree angle of which is designed to mimic the human eye.

The experience of the consumer who will later watch this footage can only be described as entering—as promised—a new reality. After putting on the VR headset, users will see their own surroundings replaced by this all-white living room and beige couch. To their left will be a spectacular view of Los Angeles, to their right, the door through which Maxwell—playing the part of the vacuum salesman—has just entered. And in front of them will be Stevens standing on a plush carpet and writhing her way out of her shirt, then her skirt and stockings, and then slowly lowering herself onto her knees to commence fellatio.

The fullness of the immersion can't be overstated. VR porn is so engulfing that when the headset comes off after 25 minutes (or five, depending), it takes a good 10 seconds to reacclimate to the world in which you actually live. The experience is jarring, and it offers the staggering realization that with the mass introduction of VR, consumers who wish to truly escape their lives can do so. One can't help but imagine socially awkward men deciding that virtual-reality porn is easier—and just as satisfying—as having sex with a real woman, but without commitment or even social niceties.

Advances in VR are coming hard and fast, and Facebook is leading the charge. At its third annual Oculus Connect conference last year, the company unveiled a handful of new VR projects, including Oculus Avatars, a program that allows consumers to create personal avatars using customized face shapes, clothing and skin tones (think metallic gold, forest green and shimmery purple). Mike Howard, Oculus Avatars' project manager, told conference attendees that there are "over a billion permutations of options" for designing your virtual self.

Extrapolating the avatar concept into the future—and into the realm of sex, which Facebook demurely avoided—means that soon we'll have the option of becoming idealized (or completely fake) versions of ourselves. Couldn't bag the hot cheerleader in high school? Make yourself the star football player in VR. Of course, that cheerleader probably isn't who she says she is either—but does it matter?

Facebook isn't the only VR pioneer, and some competitors are focusing exclusively on pornography. Among the most innovative is Amsterdam-based Kiiroo. After pioneering a line of sex toys that can be operated from thousands of miles away, Kiiroo developed a program that attempts to bridge the most frequently cited gap in VR. You can see and hear what's going on, but you can't feel it. By syncing a male masturbator to virtual porn scenes, the program, FeelPornStars, allows users to physically experience the scene in real time. For instance: As you watch Stevens perform fellatio on your headset, your masturbator would be moving along with her.

Not everyone is convinced VR porn will take off. If the setup is too time-consuming, says Bryant Paul, it may miss the mark for consumers who just want to get off quickly. "If you can make it as easy to use as my computer, great," he says. "If you're creating technology that makes it harder, I don't think it's going to work."

As of the end of last year, VR hardware hadn't sold as well as expected. In October, interactive-media research firm SuperData predicted that sales of VR headsets would hit 6 16 million in 2016 By November, that prediction had been downgraded to 4 12 million. The slow start is largely attributed to the high price of VR devices (a single headset can go for as much as R13,800 00), the fact that consumers and tech companies are still feeling out the best use for the technology and the lack of a must-have VR app

But experts are still optimistic Digi-Capital, which advises virtual-reality businesses, predicts that by 2020 revenue from VR content and headsets will reach R515 00 billion

And for now, one truth is certain. "The thing that has been proven at this point," says Burton, "is that people will pay for porn."

Back in Beverly Hills, Christie Stevens is encountering some of the problems with shooting for VR that have yet to be ironed out She and Maxwell have commenced the vaginal intercourse portion of the day, but she's getting no help from him Usually it's the job of the male porn actor to help the female performer look good—angling her properly, making sure her back is arched and her breasts are on display—but here, the camera is strapped to Maxwell's shoulder to provide the best possible point-of-view angle. His primary responsibilities are staying hard and not moving.

Stevens, then, is doing all the work. She faces forward and straddles him, inserting his penis into her vagina while maintaining eye contact with the camera. She then stands up, turns around and reinserts him while facing backward, before finally engaging in what can only be described as a sexual triceps dip. Facing forward again, Stevens places her feet astride Maxwell's hips, her hands on the coffee table behind her, and slides onto his penis, all while maintaining an uncomfortable-looking crab position

Editing isn't possible yet in virtual reality, so Stevens continues these sexual acrobatics for a single 25-minute shot with no break. That means she can't lube up, wipe sweat away or even rest her quaking muscles

Was it difficult, I ask her afterward, to engage in such demanding physical labor? "I'm gonna be honest," she says. "It was a lot of work."

Was it harder to get turned on than it might have been if she was, say, on a bed with a participating partner? "It was fine," she says

After all, she adds, dabbing her glistening forehead, "It's still sex."

Author Don Winslow Says Your Weed Habit Finances Killers

BY CAT AUER

MICHAEL LIONSTAR

The blockbuster writer on bad guys (there are plenty in 'The Cartel,' his latest inspired-by-true-life novel) and good sex scenes

Best-selling novelist Don Winslow's past is practically as colorful as the stories he crafts. Raised by a sailor and a librarian, he was instilled early on with a love of books and storytelling. Winslow knew when he was young that he wanted to be a writer but took jobs across the board and around the world: teaching Shakespeare in Oxford, leading safaris and tours in Africa and China, doing private investigation in California and New York. An epiphany in Africa led him to buckle down and finally pursue his dreams, writing his first novel, A Cool Breeze on the Underground, over three years. After a few more books and years of juggling writing and day jobs, he sold the manuscript for The Death and Life of Bobby Z to both Hollywood and Knopf. Since then, he's been writing full-time.

His latest novel, The Cartel—an epic, cross-border vendetta saga set in the brutal world of Mexican drug trafficking—was published to copious critical acclaim. A sequel to the 2005 crime thriller The Power of the Dog, The Cartel picks up the story of DEA agent Art Keller and his nemesis, drug kingpin Adán Barrera. Having spent close to a decade researching and writing a narrative that revolves around the narcotics trade, Winslow has become a passionate and outspoken advocate of ending the war on drugs; recently, he took out a full-page ad in The Washington Post. Addressed to members of Congress and the president, the eloquent open letter takes them to task for futile, ill-advised and destructive U.S. policies. "Let me come right out and say what you won't tell the American people. The war on drugs is unwinnable," Winslow argues. "At 44 years, it's America's longest war, and there's no end in sight."

Winslow, a PLAYBOY favorite—his short story By Sun and Lightning and his three-part serial Extreme both appeared in the magazine in 2014—talked with us in a far-ranging conversation about everything from why he's still writing about drugs to trying to get mugged to what makes for a good sex scene and why his best is yet to come.

PLAYBOY: The Cartel continues the drug-war tale of Art Keller and Adán Barrera. It's been a decade since The Power of the Dog was published. What is it about the war on drugs that captured your attention and held it?

WINSLOW: I didn't really want to write this one, to tell you the truth. I thought I was done with this topic. I first got into it because back in 1998 there was a massacre of 19 innocent people down in Baja, California. I asked myself how people could be capable of doing that. I didn't really start out to write a book. I didn't even start reading about drugs; I started reading about philosophy and ethics and that kind of thing, but I didn't find any answers there. Then I started researching drug traffic and Mexico and the cartels, and that turned into Power of the Dog. Five years later, when I started The Cartel, the violence had spiraled so much out of control, past what any of us ever thought could happen. I guess I felt that I should similarly try to find some answers. So I started researching again, going to history and journalism and some of the sources that I'd had in Power of the Dog. I thought I saw some patterns and decided to write The Cartel, despite having denied to everybody—my wife, my agent, my friends—that I was going to do it.

PLAYBOY: What kind of patterns did you notice?

WINSLOW: Things have changed. One of the major changes was the militarization of drug

> ***"The people who are partying on coke and marijuana and all of that need to take the responsibility of knowing where it comes from. And it comes from sociopathic mass murderers."***

trafficking, where one cartel hired their own private army. They recruited a bunch of special forces soldiers who'd been trained largely in the United States and got them to desert and come over to the other side. That sort of started an arms race between the cartels, where each leader decided that he or in some cases she needed to get their own private armies. You had this escalation of the lethality, of the people and of the weaponry. It used to be that these drug traffickers would slug it out themselves with a few guys, but now they farm it out to these armies made up of special forces or current or ex-police. In 2006, when the Mexican government decided to try to crack down, it realized it couldn't do it with the police; it had to send in the military, and that escalated things all the more.

PLAYBOY: Given the depth of your research, were you ever tempted to write nonfiction on the topic?

WINSLOW: Well, I thought about it. I always start off in nonfiction mode in order to research. I'm a historian by training and kind of a geek, so that's automatically where I go. With The Cartel, when I was just trying to find answers and lying to myself that I wasn't doing it to write a book [laughs], I started a chronology because I'm a big believer that C follows B and B follows A. I jotted down anything that happened related to the drug wars in Mexico on any given day. I ended up with a 157-page single-spaced document. I really discovered things. But I think that, really, I'm a better novelist than a nonfiction writer. And I think novels can do things that journalism can't or isn't allowed to. We get to imagine the inner thoughts and emotions of people, we get to make things up, we get to take real events but put them in dramatic structures.

PLAYBOY: You dedicate The Cartel to 131 journalists in Mexico who were murdered or "disappeared" during the period the book covers. Can you talk about that?

WINSLOW: I have very high regard for journalism. I read five newspapers a day; I'm a news junkie. I felt I owed it to these men and women who were killed for trying to do this job. While I'm not a journalist, I am a fellow writer, and I feel something of a brotherhood and a sisterhood there. I thought they deserved to be named. The cartels had become so sophisticated that they had figured out they didn't just need to control the action, they needed to control the narrative. What we're seeing from ISIS now I think is taken from the cartels.

PLAYBOY: You mention the parallels between the cartels and ISIS in your open letter to Congress, do you think ISIS is in some ways following the cartels' playbook?

WINSLOW: Yeah, I do. Long before ISIS was putting out vid clips of their atrocities, the Zetas in Mexico were — and other cartels followed suit. They started that. They had the idea that they would control social media and journalism, newspapers. They attacked television and radio stations with rocket launchers and machine guns. It's a war for drugs, but also a war against all kinds of freedoms, including freedom of the press — and in many ways a war against truth. And just as ISIS does, the cartels use it for terror, intimidation and, also in the same sick way that ISIS does, as a means of recruitment.

PLAYBOY: A thought that drug lord Adán Barrera has in The Cartel is, "The North Americans never learn" — a realization he uses to his advantage. You repeated the idea — "We never learn" — in your open letter. What's the effect of not learning from our mistakes?

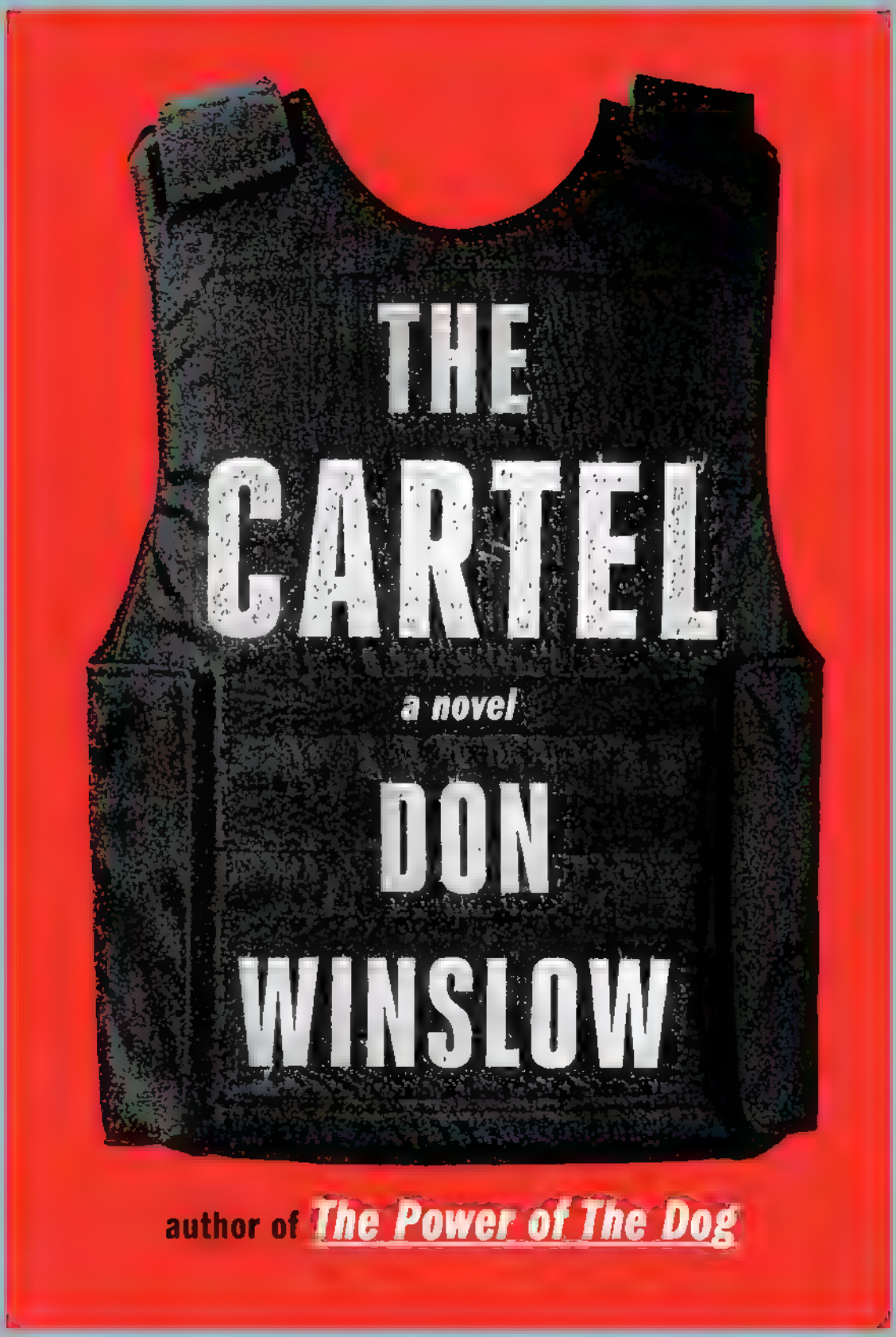
WINSLOW: The effect on Mexico, Central America and our own society has been catastrophic. In terms of the money we've spent, the lives that have been lost, the people we've put in prison, the families shattered, the social fabric shattered, the alienation between our police and our inner city communities — I had five cops call me commenting on that ad, saying, "I'd never say this in public, but you're dead right; you got it exactly."

PLAYBOY: Have you had any reaction from politicians?

WINSLOW: Not one. [*Laughs*] Maybe it was naïve or overly optimistic, but I had hoped that if I challenged them a bit in their hometown paper, which I hope appears on their desk with their coffee in the morning, that maybe I could get a conversation started. But no, I have not heard from a single politician.

PLAYBOY: Cannabis is gaining more and more acceptance legally, socially. What are your thoughts on America's drug culture?

WINSLOW: My thoughts are complicated. We're starting to legalize marijuana — it seems to be headed in that direction, and I think that's a positive step, but it's a partial step. It's already had some beneficial effects. Since some states have legalized or decriminalized it, marijuana coming up through the border is down almost 40 percent. The cartels in Durango and Sinaloa are stopping growing the stuff because they can't compete with the quality and prices in the United States. Just by ending the prohibition of marijuana in some states, we've cut



Courtesy Knopf

marijuana smuggling almost in half in two years, after 43 futile years. That's the positive effect. It's had a negative effect in the sense that the Sinaloa cartel, the dominant power by far in the Mexican drug scene, has responded to its loss of marijuana income by increasing production of heroin and lowering the price. The people who were getting street pills are now going to black-tar heroin because it's cheaper. Because it's illegal, the cartel still controls that business. I wonder what would happen if we legalized opiates, legalized heroin and all of that. We might, over the course of time, put the cartels out of business.

The other part of my feeling about American drug use — it's complicated, and it seems contradictory — is until we get our laws straightened out into some kind of sanity, I'm very much against recreational drug use. The people who are partying on coke and marijuana and all of that need to take the responsibility of knowing where it comes from. And it comes from sociopathic mass murderers.

PLAYBOY: So for you it's a moral issue?

WINSLOW: It is absolutely a moral issue. How can you say you'll only buy fair-trade coffee and then go smoke weed that might've been grown by slave labor in Mexico, by women who are standardly raped and turned out to prostitution? Drugs that've been muled up across the border by fathers, the cartels are holding their families until they deliver the drug and often kill them anyway? I blame the prohibition of drugs, but I also blame the recreational drug use. I just can't understand going out and having a good time on somebody else's suffering. Sorry to be preachy. People always give me the same answer — they know where their dope came from, it came from Eddie down the street, who grew it in his window box or in his bedroom. And I go, "Yeah, okay, but those trailer trucks are coming up full of something by the ton, and I don't think Eddie's growing that in his closet."

PLAYBOY: Your first novel, A Cool Breeze on the Underground, was published when you were in your late 30s. Tell me about what you were doing beforehand and how you came to writing.

WINSLOW: To be really honest with you, I've always wanted to do this. Since I was a little kid, this is what I've wanted to do — be a novelist. But, you know, the world didn't agree for a long time. I had to make a living, so I did a lot of different things. I managed movie theaters in New York. I was a private eye. I led photographic safaris in Africa and China. I came back and went back to investigative work out here in California as a consultant to law firms. I taught Shakespeare in the summers at Oxford. I was cobbling together a living doing whatever I could do, all the time thinking, I want to be writing. But you come up with a lot of excuses for yourself, you know, because you're afraid of failing, and the psychological cost of failure would've been so high. Finally, I was sitting in Africa, at dawn — it sounds very melodramatic — by a fire, shivering a little bit from malaria, and I thought, "You'd just better do this and stop with the excuses." I decided to write five pages a day no matter what, and that's what I did. I think it was three years, and I had a book. Now, 14 publishers didn't think it was a book! [*Laughs*]

> ***"Strong women are more fun to write; I try to write them be cause they're more interesting. If you met my wife, you'd un derstand."***

PLAYBOY: But that 15th

WINSLOW: The 15th one did and gave me a two-book contract, and I was already writing the second one as I was getting rejection slips for the first.

PLAYBOY: And you were still doing side work?

WINSLOW: Yeah. I'd be doing stakeouts, scribbling away. The interview and research techniques I learned were really helpful. When I first started out [with investigative work], I did a lot of street work in New York in Times Square, looking for pickpockets, making low-level dope buys so we could turn it over to the police to chase them out, because we worked for businesses in the area. I was bait for a while. I would troll around, because I'm a small guy, trying to get mugged. We hired thugs to follow me and jump in, it was like the rodeo. Looking for runaway teenagers, stakeouts — that kind of stuff. Then at a later phase I did homicide cases, both for the prosecution and defense.

PLAYBOY: When were you able to set that aside and focus on writing 100 percent?

WINSLOW: I've been more or less a full-time writer since 1996 or 1997. I was commuting to downtown L.A., where I was working on a case in the same law office every day — in the Biltmore Hotel, actually, kind of a bit Raymond Chandler–esque. I would write a chapter going up and a chapter going down. It was just more fun to write a book than to read a book. It [The Death and Life of Bobby Z] sold to the movies on a Friday afternoon and sold to Knopf on the following Monday, and all of a sudden I could be a full-time writer.

PLAYBOY: Do you remember your first encounter with Playboy magazine?

WINSLOW: Of course, what American boy doesn't? In junior high, my friends Victor and Mark brought in a Playboy. They would cut it up and slip the pictures into their schoolbook folders, and we'd sell the pictures to other kids for 50 cents. [Laughs] Sure, I remember it very well. I also remember that Victor thought our 7th grade algebra teacher looked very much like one of the women in the magazine and actually went up and asked her. He got a vacation from school for a couple of weeks. We debated it for a long time. It was so titillating that we just couldn't resist discussing it. The possibility was just so mind-boggling when you're in seventh grade. It kept us going for a while. Algebra was pretty boring.

PLAYBOY: You've created plenty of strong, smart female characters, including in the short stories you did for PLAYBOY. How has your approach to writing women characters changed over the years?

WINSLOW: I think we've all sort of evolved a little bit, and women's roles have evolved. Strong women are more fun to write; I try to write them because they're more interesting. If you met my wife, you'd understand. I've been married to the same woman for 30 years, and she's a strong, wild woman. So I have that example always around me. [*Laughs*]

In terms of The Cartel, the role of women in Mexico in the drug scene has changed so radically in the past 10 years that it really demanded a very different look. You had things you'd never had before: Women cartel leaders, for instance, who took on roles because all the men had been killed or jailed, others who had been in prison for relatively minor crimes and met drug traffickers there and came out and decided, Yeah, why shouldn't I be in that business, why shouldn't I own a piece of that instead of just being a courier or something? On the other side, you have these remarkable young women who took over jobs as police officers when their four predecessors had been killed for it, or some of these social activists in Juarez and Chihuahua who took on the army, the police, the government, demanding human rights, and all too often were killed for it. I have no way of accounting for that kind of courage, that kind of moral backbone. It's just amazing to me.

PLAYBOY: Let's rewind all the way to your beginnings. What role did books and storytelling play in your childhood?

WINSLOW: Immense. My old man was a sailor, one of the great raconteurs of all time. He'd have his Navy buddies over, and I'd literally get under the table. He'd pretend to think I'd gone to bed, and as long as I was quiet, he'd let me sit there, at the feet of these great storytellers, and listen. I could listen to those stories over and over and over again. My mom was a librarian and my dad a great reader, so we always had books in the house. We were allowed to read anything we wanted, at any age, and as long as we were reading there was no bedtime — they were perfectly happy for us to just pass out while reading. My older sister by two years [Kristine Rolofson] is also a novelist, very highly regarded. Two kids in the house, and they both become professional writers. So, yeah, an absolutely immense role.

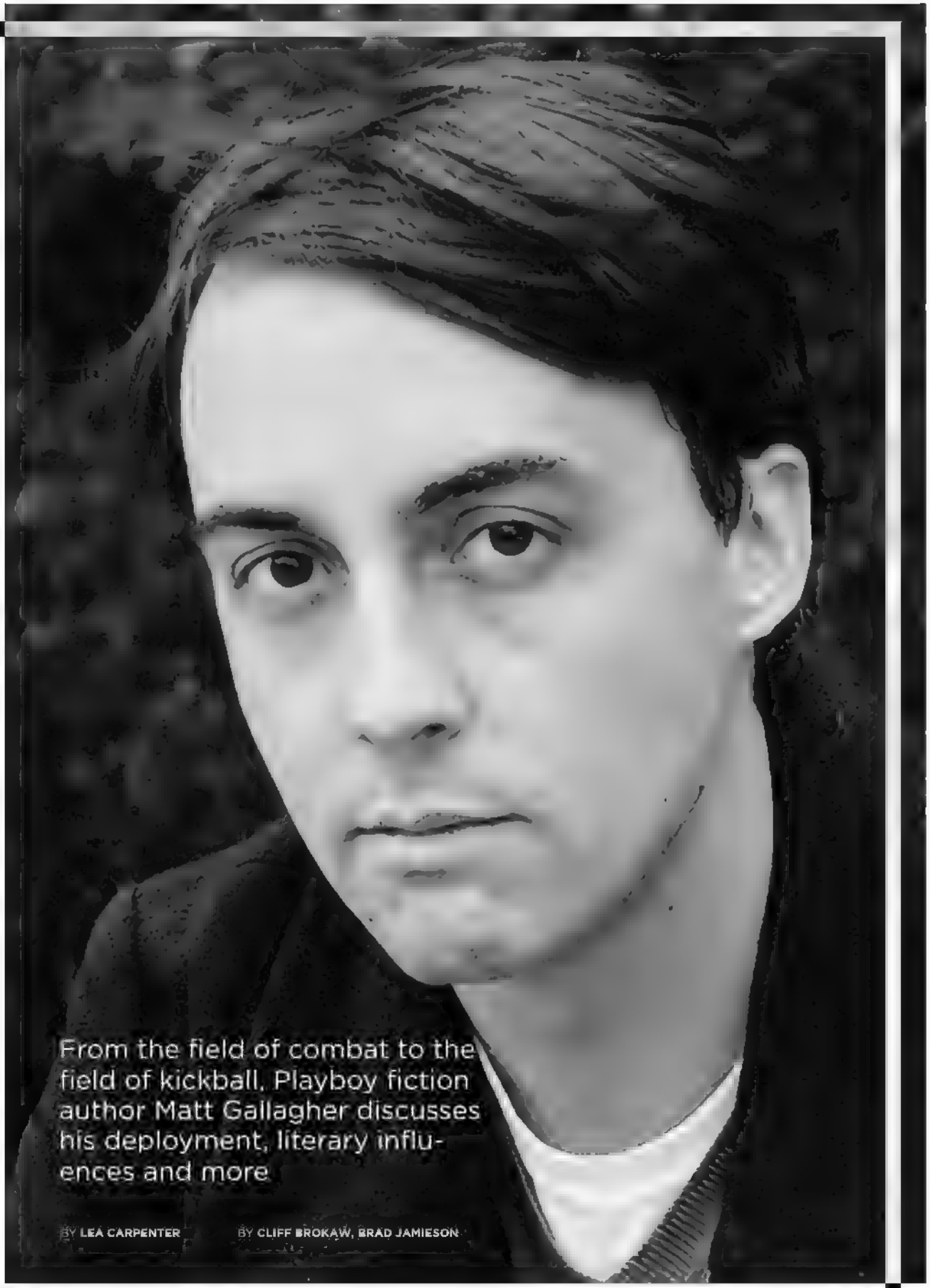
PLAYBOY: What's your advice on how to write a good sex scene?

WINSLOW: Oh my God. [*Laughs*] I think that like any other action scene, a good sex scene reveals character and moves the story forward. And in the same way you handle action, or maybe even violence, you want it to have a physical feel. I want that reaction from the reader. So if I'm writing a gunfight, I want a fearful, suspenseful reaction, but if I'm writing a sex scene — or a love scene, if you will — I want to use words and sounds that are sensual and sexy. To be perfectly honest with you, I work pretty hard at it. An action scene has a certain kind of rhythm to it, and a sex scene has a certain kind of rhythm to it, and they're hopefully quite different. Not always, but usually. You want softer, longer sounds, softer consonants, as opposed to plosive consonants, longer vowels, that kind of thing. That's what I work for.

PLAYBOY: What projects are on your plate right now?

WINSLOW: Right now I'm doing nothing but touring with Cartel, but you know I've snuck in half a short story here and there. I have a couple of fiction books in the works, neither of them about drugs. And I will say this, I don't think I've written my best book yet. I think that's in my future. I think I still have a lot to learn and a lot to achieve. I think I can do a lot more with words and a lot more with style and am looking forward to doing that. I don't know if I could get up in the morning if I didn't think that.

Author
Matt Gallagher and Lea Carpenter Talk Sex, War and Writing



From the field of combat to the field of kickball, Playboy fiction author Matt Gallagher discusses his deployment, literary influences and more

BY LEA CARPENTER

BY CLIFF BROKAW, BRAD JAMIESON

Matt Gallagher's bright green Chucks stand in sly contrast to his low-key demeanor. He's a writer from Reno who now lives in New York City, and a former U.S. Army captain who turned his wartime blog into a memoir, Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War. He also writes fiction, including Babylon, his short story for PLAYBOY's July/August issue, about a lesbian kickball umpire and Marine named Marti who's still adjusting to post-deployment life in Brooklyn.

We met for the first time five years ago in a coffee shop by Columbia, he was completing his MFA, rather rare—I thought then—for a former Cavalry officer trained at Fort Knox and stationed in Iraq for 15 months. And though he comes across at first as a little shy, he's actually anything but. On anything intellectual or literary he is clear and confident and fierce.

Gallagher is central to a new generation of veterans writing fiction, using literature as a lens to process their experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. The ability to ride a horse across Baghdad doesn't preclude a person from producing heartbreaking prose, as Gallagher did most recently in his novel Youngblood. Writers Richard Ford and Colum McCann and Ben Fountain and Tim O'Brien have all praised his work. New York Times critic Michiko Kakutani called Youngblood "an urgent and deeply moving novel."

> ***"Breathing life into characters and stories at the expense of oneself is central to the author's purpose, I think."***

These days, Gallagher spends his mornings writing and, after lunch and a trip to the dog park, his afternoons revising. We talked about everything from kickball and character development to conflict literature and counterinsurgency.

PLAYBOY: Tell me about the inspiration for your extraordinary story, Babylon.

GALLAGHER: Thank you, I'm glad you liked the story. Babylon has a few different origins. For one, my wife and I played in a Brooklyn kickball league a couple of years ago with friends, and while we had fun, the absurdity of it all couldn't be ignored. The environment seemed ripe for literary exploration—not just the silliness and the overgrown childishness, but the moments of earnestness and kindness, even generosity. I'd also been reading more about the homecoming experiences of women veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of it felt familiar to my own return home and those of my soldiers, but much of it felt completely foreign. The idea that some veterans of these wars felt the need to hide away that part of themselves from society and from their families, just because of their gender—that bothered me. And when something bothers me, I tend to start writing to figure out why.

PLAYBOY: When writing Babylon, was it harder for you to channel the mind of a Marine who is a lesbian or a Brooklyn hipster—or does it even matter, as fiction is essentially the channeling of voices?

GALLAGHER: Well, I was an Army Cavalry officer, and the Cav can be somewhat more . . . unconventional than the Marine Corps. But Babylon, which is set around a hipster Brooklyn kickball league and about the particularities of a changing first-world ecosystem, didn't need any more unconventionality. It needed some rigidness. It needed some yuts and oo-rahs and Marine-style pride.

So while it's true that I've never been a woman nor have I been a Marine, I have known loneliness. I have longed for the past, at least a past distilled in memory. I have witnessed the pitfalls of gentrification, and its benefits. Getting to know Marti, and the other characters of Babylon, proved a true joy as I wrote and rewrote the story. Breathing life into characters and stories at the expense of oneself is central to the author's purpose, I think.

PLAYBOY: Is there a new literature emerging from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? If so, what defines it?

GALLAGHER: It certainly feels like we're in the midst of something. Whether it ends up being anything of significance or meaning will be up to the works involved and their quality. As for unique traits in this growing canon, I've noticed two: an interest in the perspective of the "other," be they enemy combatants, local civilians or interpreters; and a keen interest in America's all-volunteer force—what its effects are on the individuals who make up this force, and what the effects will be for our country as a whole.

PLAYBOY: Once you've written about war, is it hard to write about other more mundane things?

GALLAGHER: When I was in my 20s, I thought so. Now I've grown to more appreciate the mundane, both in writing and in life. War writing is like any sort of writing. It can be good, it can be mediocre, it can be bad. It's the work that separates, not the subject.

PLAYBOY: Our friend Phil Klay (author of the National Book Award-winning collection Redeployment) said, "War is too strange to be processed alone." Is this part of what inspired the creation of Words After War, the nonprofit you now help run?

GALLAGHER: Absolutely. Teaching writing for Words After War has continually fulfilled and inspired me. The organization is devoted to bringing veterans and civilians together to discuss and critique conflict literature. It bridges the vast, ethereal military-civilian divide every day, in tangible, meaningful ways. Some of the writing that has emerged from its workshops is just stunning.

PLAYBOY: Why did you choose Youngblood as the title for your new novel?

GALLAGHER: It's a slang term used in the military, particularly in the combat arms branches, referring to new, untested soldiers. Experienced sergeants say it with that strange blend of derision and compassion. In the novel, I believe it refers to a multitude of characters, American soldiers and local Iraqis. All of them are trying to find their way through the ruin, trying to figure out the least worst choice in a land of only awful choices. After nine years of war and occupation in Iraq, that hope is all that remains.

PLAYBOY: What was the origin of your war blog?

GALLAGHER: Oh, the blog. Seems like forever ago. In 2007, as my scout platoon and I prepared to deploy to Iraq as part of the 25th Infantry Division, I began researching online for what awaited us. I came across a variety of military blogs that explained very clearly and cleanly what counterinsurgency looked like for soldiers on the ground. It also stoked a fire in me. I'd grown up reading and writing as a way of making sense of the world, and I thought, Hey, I could do this too. So I did, and called it Kaboom as a sort of stupid, immature joke about the threat of roadside bombs. What can I say? I was 24 and directly reckoning with my mortality for the first time.

PLAYBOY: How did how you were raised prepare you for what you saw in Iraq?

GALLAGHER: I grew up in the suburbs, the son of two lawyers. So nothing in my background could've prepared me for the type of third-world poverty I saw there. But I was raised a Presbyterian, and thus raised to respectfully question prevailing wisdom. Putting ideals into practice is hard and messy. It's also what we all have to do in life if we are ever to become the person we aspire to be.

PLAYBOY: During your deployment, what was the most emotional experience you had?

GALLAGHER: The moments I return to the most are the personal encounters with the local children. Especially the orphans.

PLAYBOY: How was your transition back to civilian life?

GALLAGHER: About as ideal as anyone could hope for, though of course it still had its strange moments. Once, shortly after I came home and moved to New York, I got off the subway in a not-nice part of Brooklyn while a gang fight was going on down the block. A couple pistol shots went off. People began running every which way while I took a knee behind a car and looked around for my radioman. I felt really dumb when I realized where I was (and where I wasn't), though when I got a confused look from an old man hobbling across the street, I thought, I found cover, dude. You're in the middle of the street. You're the crazy one.

PLAYBOY: How did you meet your wife, Annie, and what was it like navigating a relationship while you were on deployment?

GALLAGHER: We went to high school together. But we didn't start dating until some years later, when she was in college and I'd graduated and joined the Army. Our relationship during that time was like a lot of long-distance ones. We kept in touch over phone and e-mail. We tried to share as much of our respective lives with one another while still living our own. These wars allowed for that communication in a way that previous ones didn't, I don't know. Maybe it worked because we didn't put great long-term expectations on it until we had the luxury and space to.

PLAYBOY: Which authors were critical as you developed your own voice as a writer?

GALLAGHER: Katherine Anne Porter, Maya Angelou, Ernest Hemingway, Ralph Ellison and Stephen Crane, for five. All Americans, all deceased. Not sure if that's a coinci

> ***"Putting ideals into practice is hard and messy. It's also what we all have to do in life if we are ever to become the person we aspire to be."***

dence or not

PLAYBOY: What are your thoughts on writing about sex and desire, two subjects famously hard to put into words? I love the scene in Joan Didion's Democracy—a novel about a war that's not exactly a war novel—where Jack watches Inez walk off plane in the pouring rain. Didion simply has him say, "Get her out of the goddamn rain." That scene delivers desire without being explicit. No one is naked, they are not even in the same room

GALLAGHER: That scene is superb, as is that novel. Good literature aspires to reveal the many layers of the human condition, how can that not include sex and desire? The latter serves as a driving force for Marti and her cousin Squatch in Babylon, and for a variety of characters in Youngblood, American and Iraqi. I'm not just talking about Marti's trips to Mama's Lounge, either, or the thrill foreign soldiers feel in their chests when they catch a glimpse of the sheik's mysterious daughter. What happens when what we seek comes into the scope of another? What happens when that pursuit conflicts with the search of another, or perhaps worse, proves to be the very same thing as theirs? Desire can give purpose to existence. It can also inhibit and destroy. Literature has brooded over these fates since the beginning.

PLAYBOY: James Salter or Michael Herr?

GALLAGHER: Both are masters, of course, but so different. Salter's craft was all sculpture, each sentence and idea so polished and clean. Herr's work captures something else, something more raw and visceral, even if it sometimes came out messy. So gun to my head, I'd say Herr. I like a bit of chaos in art.

PLAYBOY: Stanley McChrystal or David Petraeus?

GALLAGHER: Another tough one, but I'll have to go with Petraeus. I spent 15 formative months as a COIN [counterinsurgency] disciple in the Iraqi desert, and Petraeus was the COIN prophet.

For those unfamiliar, COIN in Iraq represented a shift in strategy and approach. It happened as part of the Surge and the Sunni Awakening in 2007 or so, and came with the realization that we weren't going to be able to shoot our way out of the war. The most vivid description of COIN I ever got as a young lieutenant was "You know, like British imperial occupation." That's not totally exact, but it isn't wrong either. It's about the long game, being a jack-of-all-trades immersed with the people, being beat cops and conducting electricity surveys and dealing with roadside bombs and snipers all at the same time.

> ***"The public's fascination with Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and whatever goofy acronym Delta Force goes by now is both understandable and alarming."***

It worked in Iraq, at least temporarily. We thought we'd won the war when we came home in 2009, if wars like Iraq can be won. But that peace couldn't be sustained, which is tragic for a lot of reasons. Foremost for the Iraqi people.

PLAYBOY: Army or Marines?

GALLAGHER: Well of course I'm going to say Army, but my grandfather was a career Naval officer, so I have great respect for our sailors and what they do. Even if that crackerjack uniform belongs in the pajamas aisle. The old notion is that the Army's culture is more egalitarian, and perhaps that's still true.

PLAYBOY: Why does America adore and glamorize special operations?

GALLAGHER: I'll say this. Both the Army and the Marines are so much more than the special operations within them. The public's fascination with Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and whatever goofy acronym Delta Force goes by now is both understandable and alarming. The idea of the mysterious supersoldier rappelling from the sky like a shadow ninja to save the day can be comforting. It's also not representative of who makes up the armed forces or what the armed forces do as a whole in our collective name.

PLAYBOY: What are you working on now?

GALLAGHER: A second novel, centered on post-empire America. Vague, I know! It still needs a lot of work, but I'm excited for its potential.

Lea Carpenter's first novel, Eleven Days (Knopf, 2013), was short listed for the Center for Fiction prize and long listed for the Baileys. Her second novel, set in the intelligence world, is forthcoming from Knopf.

The Muses of Playboy Photographer Douglas Kirkland

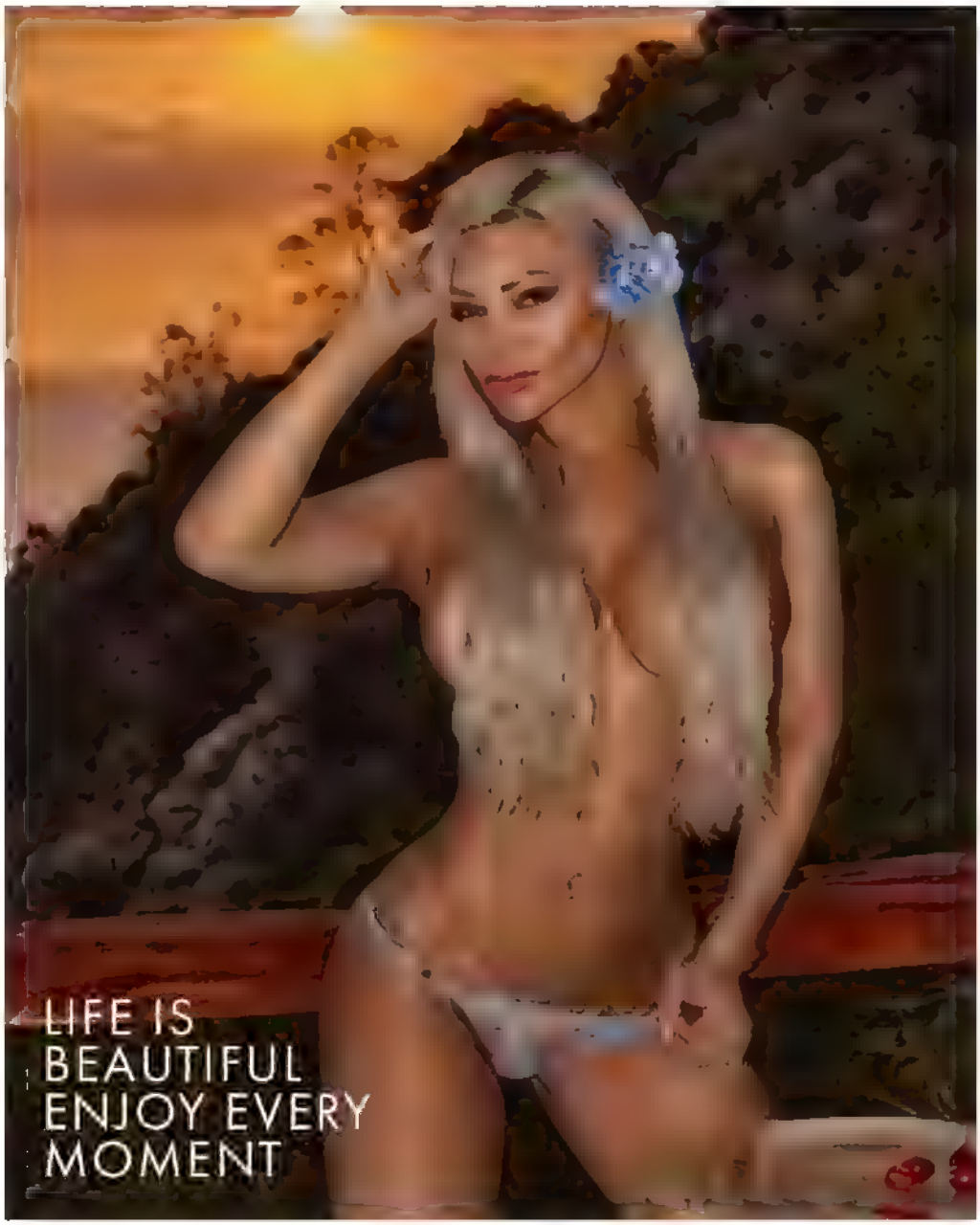
INTRODUCTION BY **LIZ SUMAN**

PHOTOS BY **DOUGLAS KIRKLAND**

Whether he was photographing Marilyn Monroe wrapped seductively in bed sheets or Robert De Niro jamming hard on a sax, Douglas Kirkland has always had an eye for capturing his muses in their element

Last month, we spoke with photographer and former Playboy contributor Douglas Kirkland in the days leading up to his 50-year retrospective in Los Angeles, which featured iconic images of everyone from a sun-kissed Brigitte Bardot playing cards on a Mexico floor in 1965, to a toothy Jack Nicholson gripping his Oscar statuette in '75. The following collection includes a combination of photographs from Kirkland's recent show at Mouche Gallery, multiple shots from the then-27-year-old-photographer's famous night with Marilyn Monroe, who was featured on the 25th Anniversary of Look magazine in 1961, images from Kirkland's new book, Freeze Frame, and exclusive images of actress Margot Kidder, who Kirkland shot in 1975, from the Playboy Archive.

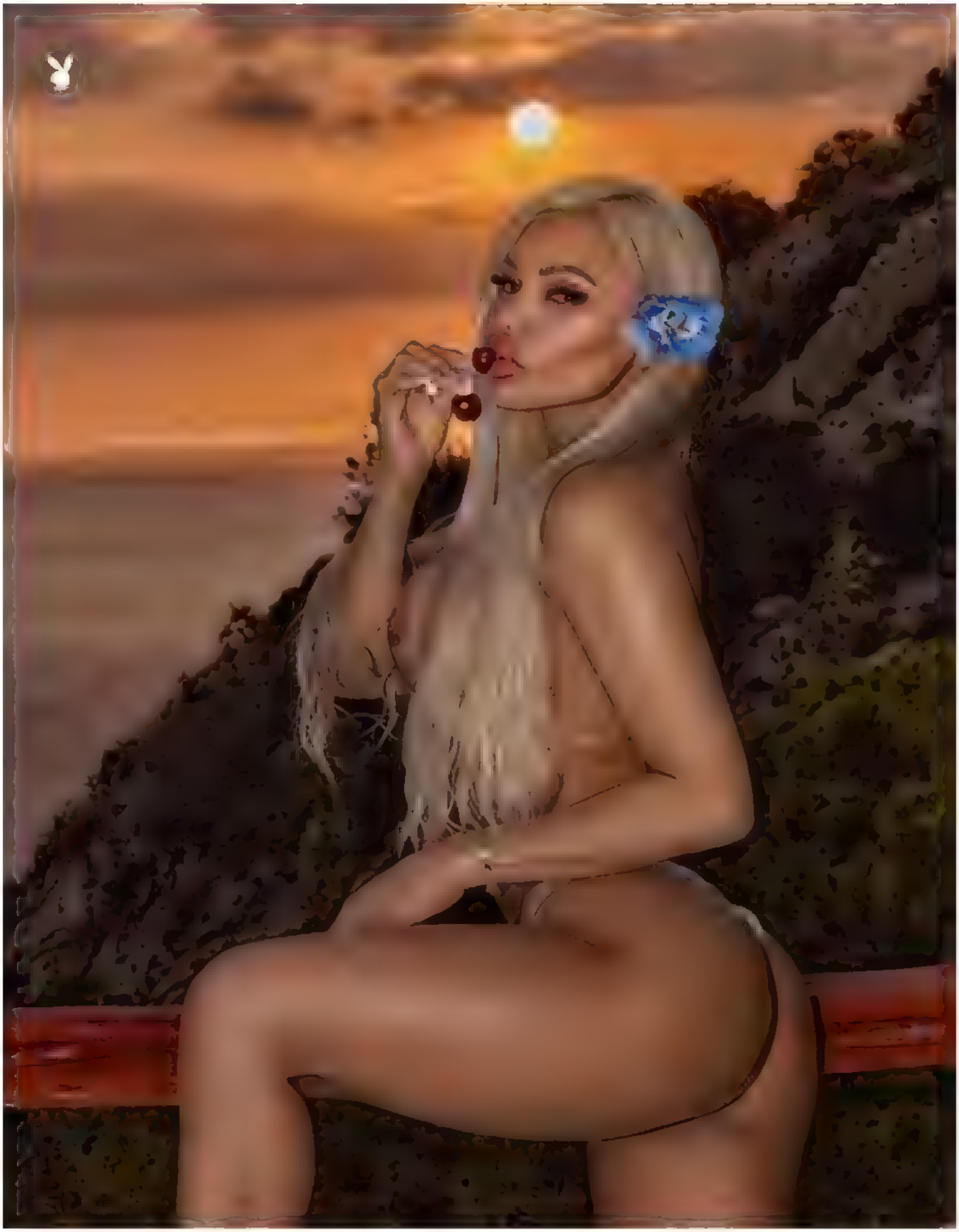
Swedish actress Ann-Margret rips through the Nevada desert in 1981



LANA DE OLIVEIRA

Instagram **@lana_de_oliveira_**

Photography by **Alec Fasani @alecfasani.glamphoto & Sean Ryan | @seanryanglamourphotographer**
MUA **Lauren Buckley ibiza Makeup | @ljbmakeup**
Location 1 **@haciendanaxamena**
Collaborator 2 **@ibizahikestation**
Lingerie **@honeybirdette**



We're happy to have you featured. Can you give us a bit of background on your career as a model and where it all started? I was born and brought up in Amazonia, Brazil. When I was 16, after impressing during casting, I joined a band as a dancer. My parents were initially uneasy about this, but eventually agreed, realizing that weekend rehearsals and concerts would not impact my education. A modeling agent saw me dancing and as a result, I signed my first contract to help promote sportswear sold by a chain of gyms. It was fantastic getting paid for something that was great fun. In addition to money, I was also allowed to choose clothes from the sportswear I modeled and given free gym membership. After that, I knew modeling was a career for me.

Tell us about the moment you found out you were going to be featured in the magazine and what was your initial reaction? I was having a very busy and stressful day at work when the agent from Playboy called me and said that my casting was successful and that I needed to pack my bags and get ready to travel to Ibiza in Spain for the photoshoots. Suddenly I had a huge smile on my face, I always dreamed about being a Playboy bunny, but honestly being on the cover is much better than in my dreams. All the models that have inspired me, like Marilyn Monroe and Kim Kardashian, have appeared on the Playboy cover and I was so happy to be joining them. My family is quite religious and conservative and initially, they were very apprehensive about me appearing in Playboy, particularly my older brothers. However, after seeing how happy I was, they now completely support me. the love of my family is the most precious thing I have in my life, so it's very important for me to have their support so I am very grateful for this.

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would it be and why? Firstly, I would like to do something for all the children in the world who are frightened or hungry because of war and famine. It breaks my heart when I see their sad faces. Next, I would travel to Amazonia in Brazil, to play with the monkeys and swim with the pink dolphins, before watching the beautiful sunset on the river. To end my perfect day, I would go to an electronic music festival to see my favorite DJ play my favorite songs on stage and then finish the show with fireworks, because this makes me feel happy and alive.

Do you have any hidden talent, if so, what is it? I'm quite a good cook. Sometimes, There's no better way of showing my affection for a man I love, then preparing him a beautiful candlelit dinner, I'am a wine lover so can not miss a nice bottle of wine red wine.

What's the best place you have ever been to in the world? My home in Amazonia will always be in my heart, I've traveled to many places in this world but fell in love with Ibiza, I go there many times every summer. It's my dream place, not just because it's the global capital of the party all my favorite DJs are residents there, I absolutely love everything the sea, the beaches, the restaurants, the music, and the nightclubs, everything. Even in winter, this magical island makes me smile.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I'm very grateful to God for everything he has already given me, but of course, I would like to do more. I want to live in a world without war, where children can live in peace without fear, and everybody is happy and kind to each other. I want to protect the environment, especially the Amazon, keeping the wildlife and indigenous people safe from harm in their natural habitat. I want to keep traveling and discovering the world, making memories, and having adventures. I've started to build my dream home; a villa in Brazil. I want to finish this project so I can share beautiful moments with my family and sometimes invite my friends to parties, this will be awesome.

That said, what advice would you give to all the women out there when it comes to love and relationships? I want to say that love, especially passionate love, is the most beautiful feeling in the world, but before you can love somebody else, you need to love yourself first.

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner and what do you value the most? What can I say? I'm a romantic person, I like a gentleman who knows how to make a woman feel like a queen in every way, I like a smart man who dresses elegantly. I find it sexy and attractive.

Has it ever happened that you accidentally wore an outfit that you showed off too much in public? One day I was walking in the street in central London. There was lots of wind and rain. One hand was holding an umbrella and the other was protecting my hair, when suddenly a large gust of wind lifted up my dress revealing everything. As I only had two hands, I didn't know what to hold, which was extremely embarrassing. Next time in the same situation, I will find a taxi.

What are your favorite ways to unwind and relax when you're not working or traveling? I live in the heart of London, so when I have some free time, I like to escape from the busy city and reconnect with nature, The trees, the birds, and the animals all give me positive energy for my soul. I love living in London but I miss that sometimes. I go to the gym to practice my favorite sport Capoeira, my passion is a martial Arte in the form of dance from Brazil, I like going shopping with my friends, also I like going to the theatre I love musicals, and I love going out to bars and restaurants where I can meet my friends and talk about everything, and have a fun time and laugh together.

What advice would you give aspiring models? Whether your ambition is to be a model or any other profession, believe in yourself and fight for your dreams. You are the one who knows what will make you happy. Don't pay attention to what people say. You have the power and energy to achieve whatever you want if you work hard for this, no one is born successful, and we always can learn from our mistakes, sometimes we have to start learning to drive in a car park. so fight for your dream and never give up. if you let your fears out, you will have more space to live your dreams.

Thanks so much for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last word for our reads? Firstly, thank you for taking the time to read my interview. thank you to everyone who has been with me and contributed in some way to making my dream of getting here come true If you like what you've seen and read, please follow me on Instagram @Lana_de_oliveira_ guys Let's be nice and kind to each other please for a better world life is beautiful enjoy every moment, love live laugh dance, and sing. Peace and love xxx Lana De Oliveira

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Playboy Interview

Jerry Seinfeld

A candid conversation with TV's top-rated comic about the important things: sneakers, masturbation, dating teenagers and making a hit show about nothing

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID RENSIN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MIZUNO**

This is the introduction to the Playboy Interview, the part you read before you get to the questions and answers. It's an important part. Just read what this month's subject, comedian Jerry Seinfeld, says about it.

"I think the introduction is one of the best parts of the interview. I also like where they go '[laughs]' and '[smiles].' But to tell you the truth, in the introduction you always pick up some juicy little personal tidbit, like the subject just came back from t'ai chi. You also get the thing about when the interviewer drove up to the house and what the guy was wearing, what he drank. You find he does some little thing you didn't know about, like eating potato chips through the whole interview. I remember someone once ate french fries. I thought, Whoa. He eats french fries. That's what I'm interested in.

"Plus, when something is in italics it calls a great deal of attention to itself. A word in italics almost seems to vibrate on the page. And this is a whole page of italics."

Five years ago, Jerry Seinfeld was a thin, single, mild-mannered, obsessively neat comedian working the stand-up circuit, making a name for himself as a bright and funny guy. Today, he's a thin, single, mild-mannered, obsessively neat comedian and TV star whose hit sitcom, Seinfeld, has garnered amazing media coverage and critical acclaim—especially for a show that is admittedly about nothing.

"Nothing" fits Seinfeld's particular brand of comedy—some call it observational or deconstructionist—like a glove. Seinfeld plays Jerry Seinfeld, who, of course, is a 39-year-old, thin, single and obsessively neat comedian living in an Upper West Side New York apartment. He has three friends: Elaine (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), the ex-girlfriend, now platonic gal pal, George (Jason Alexander), the balding and unemployed paragon of low self-esteem, and Kramer (Michael Richards), the eccentric neighbor who proves you can get by in life no matter how unusual your hairstyle. When they're not gathered in Seinfeld's apartment or sharing a booth at a local coffee shop, they're living life at its most mundane and uneventful, asking questions such as "Why do I get bananas? They're good for one day," confronting what Entertainment Weekly called "the little adjustments of daily urban life that no network in its right mind would turn into a sitcom."

In the wrong hands this would not be particularly funny. It would possibly even be boring. After all, how funny can an entire show about waiting for a table in a Chinese restaurant be?

Pretty funny, according to Washington Post TV critic Tom Shales, who wrote that Seinfeld can be "painfully amusing and amusingly painful." In one show, the four characters lose their car in a mall parking garage. In another they ride the subway. Recently, Jerry's car had a horrible odor he couldn't get rid of.

Seinfeld specializes in unusual topics: masturbation and who can go the longest without it, breast implants, pooper scoopers and the perils of trying to make friends as an adult. Other shows wouldn't touch these subjects with a 13-episode commitment, unless there were a few hugs and a life-affirming moral attached. Seinfeld eschews hugs. And morals. And anything that smacks of neatly summing up life in 22 minutes.

When it debuted, Seinfeld was a critical hit and a cult favorite. Cult favorites, of course, don't impress network executives unless the cult starts to grow—and the Seinfeld cult did. TV Guide said: "The yen for Seinfeld's idiosyncratic hipness is on the upswing," and went on to describe the sitcom as "resolutely minor crises played out with excruciatingly wry precision that has distinguished the show as thirtysomething,' comic style." Eventually, Seinfeld was holding its own on Wednesday nights on NBC—until ABC's Home Improvement moved in next door. The more mainstream Home Improvement clobbered Seinfeld in the ratings, so NBC moved Seinfeld to Thursday, following Cheers. The viewership expanded instantly, and NBC turned to Jerry in much the same way it turned to Bill Cosby 10 years ago—to anchor its all-important Thursday-night lineup.

Despite his youthful appearance, Seinfeld is no overnight sensation. The middle-class kid from Massapequa, Long Island had an uneventful childhood. He wasn't popular, he wasn't unpopular. He wasn't part of the in crowd, he wasn't a ladies' man. He had ambition, but it was largely unattainable: to be Superman. Instead, he decided to become a comedian. His first funny venture was taping interviews with his parakeet.

Seinfeld's late father, Kalman, was a salesman and a funny guy, but the son never considered trying to out-funny his father. And when Seinfeld graduated from Queens College, started doing stand-up and then decided on a career making people pay to laugh, his folks supported his decision.

There were a few odd jobs along the way: selling light bulbs over the phone, peddling jewelry on the sidewalks of Manhattan. Seinfeld got two nights and 70 bucks a week emceeing at the Comic Strip, and he knew he was on his way. He simply didn't realize what a slow trip it would be.

Other comics seemed to make it overnight. Garry Shandling, who first appeared on The Tonight Show about the same time as Seinfeld, became a big name, a Carson substitute and the star of a cable series, while Seinfeld continued playing small clubs and flying in coach. Shortly after being cast as the governor's joke writer on Benson for a few episodes, he showed up for work to discover he'd lost his job. No one had bothered to tell him. So Seinfeld went back to the comedy circuit, traveling 300 days a year, hitting the talk shows and doing a fairly lackluster cable special.

Slowly but steadily his success grew. Clubs turned into arenas, sold-out signs began appearing on box offices and TV producers saw him as the next Bob Newhart.

And then one day, after he and comedian pal Larry David finished performing at Catch a Rising Star, they came up with the idea for Seinfeld. Originally, it was just about two guys talking, dissecting the world—something comedians tend to do offstage with other comedians. NBC ordered a pilot.

Working on Seinfeld, says Seinfeld, is like being in a submarine. The hours are long and constant, and the responsibilities are shared among a small group, with little network interference. Seinfeld, Larry David and a tight inner circle come up with the ideas and write the scripts. Seinfeld also has to come up with a couple of minutes of material every week for the onstage monologue that winds through the show.

Although there's time for little else but work during the TV season, all the work has paid off. Seinfeld is solidly in the Nielsen top 10 and was nominated for 11 Emmys. Seinfeld himself is a media rage. There's a line of greeting cards, and the cast can be seen on boxes of Kellogg's low-fat granola. He even has a book out of observations on life called Sein Language. This is what he told the press at a New York comedy club when he announced the publishing deal: "I'm not really an author. I've been writing for 17 years. I'm just presenting it differently. I'm numbering the pages."

Here's the point in the introduction that Seinfeld likes so much—where we tell you that we asked Contributing Editor David Rensin to meet with Seinfeld and have him expand on all the stuff we just told you. Rensin had this to say about his experience:

"I met Jerry on the set. He looked just like he does on TV. Who says the camera adds 15 pounds? He gave me a Polaroid camera and asked if I would take a picture of him and his baby to put on the makeup-trailer wall next to everyone else's 'with baby' pictures. Seinfeld's baby turned out to be a 1958 baby-blue Porsche Speedster.

"During our first session, at Jerry's newly remodeled, largely unfurnished, 6,500-square-foot Hollywood Hills home, he offered me a glass of water. There were no tables so I set it on the carpet next to the couch. I had my legs up, trying to keep my shoes off the couch (with middling success). When we were done, Jerry hopped up and snatched my glass off the carpet before I could bus it myself. He wasn't taking any chances of a spill.

"Frankly, interviewing a guy who is supposed to be just like his TV character makes one wonder what to talk about. What was I going to ask him? Why do you like cereal so much? Does the TV Jerry own as many pairs of sneakers as you do? Why are you so neat? Actually, I did have a few questions designed to get at the man behind the man whom everyone thinks they know so well. But before I could ask even one, Jerry posed a question of his own."

SEINFELD: When are we going to get to the sex part?

PLAYBOY: The sex part?
SEINFELD: Yeah. I think people want to know what I'm doing sexually and what my experiences have been, what kind of sexual prowess or power I may have because of my position. What instructions were you given as far as, "Find out about his sex life"?
PLAYBOY: Okay. Do you have sex?
SEINFELD: Yes, I do
PLAYBOY: Good. And now—
SEINFELD: Is that it? Is it over?
PLAYBOY: What's your hurry?
SEINFELD: You're such a tease
PLAYBOY: Stick around.
SEINFELD: There's something else besides sex I want to talk about. I would like to blow the lid off the three quotes under the three pictures. I wasn't saying any of these things when the three pictures were taken. They are the three best pictures and the three best quotes, but they're completely unrelated to one another. In fact, if any of this is under the pictures, I'm telling you right now that there's no camera here.
PLAYBOY: What if we let you choose the quotes?
SEINFELD: Great. So put "This is not what I was saying when these pictures were taken. In fact, if any of this is under the pictures, I'm telling you right now that there's no camera here" under the first. And "When are we going to get to the sex part?" under the second. I'll think of a third as we go along.
PLAYBOY: Fine. There's one last thing to clear up. Are we talking to the real Jerry or the TV Jerry?
SEINFELD: What do you mean?
PLAYBOY: One of your TV show's conceits is that the real Jerry and the TV Jerry are supposed to be the same guy
SEINFELD: They're not that different. But I'm the real Jerry.
PLAYBOY: Can you prove it?
SEINFELD: I have no script [*holds up his hands*]
PLAYBOY: That must take away all your image worries.
SEINFELD: I found an acceptable image that was really pretty much me, and that's how I've done everything. That's why I was able to do the show and why I've succeeded as a comedian. I don't have the energy to maintain an image.
PLAYBOY: So, people who stop you on the street must really think they know you.
SEINFELD: They know me better than they know Dan Rather. You couldn't predict what Dan Rather would do in most situations, but I think you could with me. I wouldn't mind an "Excuse me" before a total stranger starts talking to me. That's the most amusing and most bizarre thing about celebrity. I'm walking down the street, someone walks up alongside of me and says, "So, how come Elaine and you got together only that one time?" They don't say, "Excuse me, could I talk to you for one second?" Nothing. We're just talking as if we've been talking for blocks. This happens all the time.
PLAYBOY: By the way, how was sex with Elaine?
SEINFELD: Well, you can see that she's very expressive. The way she moves, she has a physical fluidity. You can see that just by watching her talk. It's not a big leap for someone with imagination.
PLAYBOY: Which our readers—
SEINFELD: Probably don't have.
PLAYBOY: Why do you say that?
SEINFELD: If you have a good imagination, you usually don't need visual aids. I don't mean to offend, but who's going to get this deep into the interview anyway? They're probably at the centerfold by now.
PLAYBOY: They might have turned to it first.
SEINFELD: That's right. [*Laughs*] And now they're falling asleep.

"When are we going to get to the sex part?"

PLAYBOY: Whom would you stop on the street just to meet?
SEINFELD: Abraham Lincoln. I'd say, "I'm sorry, I'm sure you get this all the time, but I just think you're fantastic."
PLAYBOY: Seriously, are strangers so taken with Seinfeld that they insist their lives are perfect material for the show?
SEINFELD: That's a compliment. I'm doing something that seems so taken from their own lives they can't help but assume that everything in their lives must be funny.
PLAYBOY: Are they right or wrong?
SEINFELD: They're wrong. They may be funny enough to get them through that moment at the water cooler, but they're not funny enough to be on television in front of millions of people and have them buy a Geo Prizm as a result. I take it as a comment on my skill as a comedian. It seems like nothing. It should seem like something anyone could do.
PLAYBOY: What are the levels of comedy?
SEINFELD: Making your friends laugh, making strangers laugh, making strangers laugh for money and making people act like you.
PLAYBOY: Do civilians always try to make you laugh?
SEINFELD: Could you explain that to me, please? What the hell is that phenomenon? If I meet singers, I don't go, "Hey, what do you think of this?" and sing. Why would you invite that humiliation by trying to be funny around a comedian? To make a comedian laugh, you have to be funnier than you are when you make your friends laugh. Funnier than you've ever been in your life. What are the odds that you're going to succeed? Why do you try?
PLAYBOY: Are you kind to amateurs?
SEINFELD: I'm very kind. Everyone has a few fake laughs they use to get through life. The snort, the snort-chuckle, the nod-smile, the "That's good!" But they're all just nice ways of saying "Stop. Please stop."
PLAYBOY: So the constant attention of strangers—
SEINFELD: I'm annoyed. But if you're not cranky and annoyed, you can't be a comedian. Any good comedian is, by definition, highly irritable. Even I, though I may not seem to be, am constantly irritated.
PLAYBOY: What irritates you?
SEINFELD: Everything. I just hate everything and everybody. And that's why I'm so funny. If I didn't have all these sensitivities, I'd have nothing to talk about.
PLAYBOY: Do you owe your public?
SEINFELD: That's where the money's coming from, isn't it?
PLAYBOY: That's an elegant way of looking at it.
SEINFELD: That's my job: to understand what's going on in life, to figure it out. The news, books, magazines and films cover a certain portion of what's going on. But there's a lot of stuff that's not touched on, and that's my job. To tell you the truth, 75 percent of the world is not touched on except by comedians.
PLAYBOY: Which you do in your TV show—
SEINFELD: Wait. What about the sex part?
PLAYBOY: First the TV show.
SEINFELD: Oh, Seinfeld. Yes, I've seen it. It's quite a charming little piece of work, isn't it?
PLAYBOY: Especially for a show that's supposed to be about nothing. What exactly does that mean?
SEINFELD: It's actually about details. We joke that it's about nothing because there's no concept behind the show, there's nothing intrinsically funny in the situation. It's just about four people. There's no thread. No high concept.
PLAYBOY: But isn't Hollywood built on concept?
SEINFELD: That is the concept: no concept.
PLAYBOY: Which, as we've already mentioned, fuels the perception

that your real life is just as it's portrayed on the show.

SEINFELD: I play myself as I was before I got the show. I understand that people would like to think that they're looking into my actual life. It would be fun if that were true. People want to get to know people they see on TV. That's why they read interviews. That's why they watch talk shows. Other cultures accept performers as they view them. Americans see performers whom they like and they want to know, "Hey, what's behind that? How did they get to be that way? How do they come up with their ideas?"

PLAYBOY: What do you think is behind this obsession?

SEINFELD: I guess Americans are just nosy. They want a little bit more. It's the same concept behind extra-strength pain relievers. What the hell is extra strength? We don't know how much strength they were giving us, and we don't know how much more "extra" is. But we're giving you extra, and Americans like that idea. We'll throw in the floor mats when you buy a new car. It's that little something. Then, when they've found out enough about a person, they start to hate him. Then they move on to the next person.

PLAYBOY: Thanks. You've just explained the entire—

SEINFELD: Cycle of celebrity.

PLAYBOY: Can you deconstruct anything?

SEINFELD: Deconstruction. That's a very good word for what I do. I have a friend who's not a comedian, he's a computer analyst. He's always going, "See, there's something funny about this saltshaker, but I can't see it. You could see it." And it frustrates him. He's looking at the saltshaker and I'm looking at the saltshaker, and he knows there's a joke there. He can't find it.

PLAYBOY: Have you found anything you can't deconstruct?

SEINFELD: Yeah, sure. I can't crack most things. You don't realize that the joke is the diamond. The joke is the fleck of gold after going through a ton of rock. And you're saying to me, "What's rock?" The whole world is rock. I've found this little lump of gold—my comedy material—and I've made it into an act.

PLAYBOY: Do you enjoy your job?

SEINFELD: I am my job. Everything else in life pales by comparison to the interpretive experience: seeing something, interpreting it, shaping it, communicating it and being affirmed for it. Every time something funny is discovered, it's an absolute miracle. And the most amazing thing is when I have only three minutes to think of something funny. We shot a show recently where George borrows his father's car and it gets destroyed by a gang—it's actually more complicated than that. We're in this scene where I'm standing next to George and his father's car. The door is ripped off, the engine's destroyed, the windows are all smashed. We're shooting, it's late, it's cold, we need a line. What can I say? I love that.

PLAYBOY: What did you come up with?

SEINFELD: I said to him, "You know, a lot of these scratches will buff right out."

PLAYBOY: Why do you come to a scene like that without a line?

SEINFELD: Because—I knew you were going to ask that, by the way—we were going to try to make the joke with a camera shot. But once we were all standing by the car, it needed what they call a button.

PLAYBOY: So this is the thrill of comedy.

SEINFELD: I've learned that when I really need to think of something funny, I'm often able to do it. I never knew I could do that. I always thought it took hours. But I found out that sometimes the mind can work faster when it's under pressure, even comically.

PLAYBOY: Were you this quick when you were younger? Or were you quick but not funny?

SEINFELD: We have ourselves a nice little setup here, haven't we? It's worked very well. I probably was quick when I was younger, but I didn't know it, so it's the same as not being quick. Here's what it comes down to: You need talent, you need brains and you need confidence. Those are the three things you need to do virtually anything. Confidence is a fascinating commodity. There's no upper limit on the usefulness of it, as long as it doesn't bleed into arrogance. You need as much of it as you can get.

PLAYBOY: Considering your current popularity, you must be overflowing with the stuff.

SEINFELD: That's what I've gained from this show. And that's what I wanted from day one. I didn't want a successful TV series, I didn't want money, fame—any of the things any normal person would want. I wanted the confidence I would have if I could do it.

PLAYBOY: How do you know when it becomes arrogance?

SEINFELD: When you're losing. When you start making bets that you're not winning. I've always had a lot of confidence. But I wanted more. As a comedian you're never as good as you want to be. To me that means being strong enough to take your time with an audience. Young comedians—most comedians—work onstage at a breathless pace, and that's out of fear. I do it, too. It keeps it going. But when you can slow down and hold people, that's being good enough. I love seeing Bill Cosby tell a story slowly. Comedy strength is slowness. Jack Benny is a perfect example. He would come out onstage, wouldn't say anything. He would just stand there and the people would start to laugh. I mean, that is comic strength. But to wait for the laugh, that's balls. And I say balls only because it's Playboy.

> "I don't mean to offend, but who's going to get this deep into the interview anyway?"

PLAYBOY: Can you apply this to other things?

SEINFELD: It applies to everything. Of course it applies to life. The good things in life, the most interesting things in life, are the things that distill life—like comedy, like baseball and art. Whatever takes the experience and kind of crushes it down into something you can grab. That's why you go to a movie. That's why you read a book. That's why everybody likes epigrams and aphorisms. You feel, like, if you go to a movie, maybe you'll experience more of life in that two hours than you would in just your own life. That's what a lot of entertainment is: a condensed life experience.

PLAYBOY: Let's get back to Seinfeld. Is it true that all the cast members hate one another?

SEINFELD: Yes. We're at one another's throats constantly. [*Laughs*]

PLAYBOY: How are you dealing with Kramer's transformation into a pop-culture superstar?

SEINFELD: I think he's bigger than I am. Michael Richards has a unique talent, which needed to find a place. Before this show, nobody was using him properly. He's like this engine, just running and running. It's not in gear, it's not driving anything. And if you don't hook it up with something, it's going to turn on you. Having a talent is a kill-or-be-killed thing. Especially comedic talent. It has to be focused on other people, or it turns on you in the most vicious way.

PLAYBOY: And then what happens?

SEINFELD: You become self-destructive. Or you have to leave the country. I know a guy who had to leave the country.

PLAYBOY: Isn't he just killing himself in some other country?

SEINFELD: No, he's forgotten about it. He's away from it. He doesn't have to see all his friends on TV and know that he's funnier than they are but he's not doing anything.

PLAYBOY: How are you taking your own transformation into an icon?

SEINFELD: Great. Unfortunately, right now I'm out of control

PLAYBOY: If you're talking about the line of Seinfeld greeting cards, that does seem over the top

SEINFELD: Yeah, I wasn't too happy with the greeting cards. It seemed like a good idea then. We were approached by a reputable merchandiser, and at the time we weren't doing well against Home Improvement. We needed every bit of promo we could get. By the time the stuff came out, the landscape had changed. It's not really right for us anymore.

PLAYBOY: Is that what you mean by being out of control?

SEINFELD: No. For 98 percent of my career I was completely at the wheel. All my performances, my level, my workload—it was all under control. Now I'm just hanging on to this thing. My career has now developed a life and a power of its own, and I am just a passenger. I don't like peaks. I always wanted to have a plateau kind of career. I shudder when I see these people skyrocket and then flame out in a second. I wouldn't want Madonna's kind of career, where you constantly have to make battleships disappear. I'm more into watchmaking. I'm most interested in having a body of work, to say that I created all this material and I did these shows.

PLAYBOY: So you're in this for the long haul?

SEINFELD: I will have longevity. I'd like to play the London Palladium when I'm 100, just like George Burns. No, make that 110. But I still can't believe it can go on the way it has for much longer. I mean, I'm almost out of things to say. No, I'm just kidding.

PLAYBOY: Enough about you. Why is Seinfeld a hit?

SEINFELD: It has an urban flavor. It's about single life. Everyone is single at some point. But mostly it's about being offbeat. Almost everything we do is offbeat. Even ordinary things somehow come out offbeat. We don't want to do stuff we've seen. We try to step into real life. When Roseanne does a show about teenage abortion, that's real too. But our field of expertise seems to be more minute.

PLAYBOY: Who's the audience?

SEINFELD: The bored, the disaffected, the disenfranchised. The tired, the huddled masses. I did a bit about that on the show. "Must we specifically request the worst people in the world? Why don't we just say our doors are open and we'll take whatever you've got? Do we have to say, 'Give us your tired, your poor'? Do they have to be tired? People who don't return calls—anybody who can't do something—send them over." You have to expose yourself to the show for a while, develop a taste for the characters, the situations, the jokes, the stories. It's not everyone's cup of tea.

PLAYBOY: It wasn't when it was on Wednesday nights.

SEINFELD: Home Improvement was killing us. It has a broader appeal.

PLAYBOY: Why are you doing better on Thursdays?

SEINFELD: I don't know.

PLAYBOY: Your co-creator, Larry David, said that if people didn't watch on Wednesdays he didn't want them to watch on Thursdays.

SEINFELD: I never agreed with that. I wanted people to watch it. The show is funny. There's not much good comedy on TV, period. Funny is hard. It's like Michelangelo's David. I was just in Florence. I saw the David. I also saw some of the other statues littered around the city—the legs were too thick, the proportions off—and it was clear Mike knew what he was doing. Sitcoms are hard because there are so many people involved, and good comedy is always specific. Our show is basically run by Larry David and me without any interference. That's one reason the material is good. We're not trying to please anybody but ourselves. It's not homogenized, it's not run through the system.

PLAYBOY: And how would that change things?

SEINFELD: We did this line in the show a couple weeks ago where an ex-boyfriend of Elaine's was being operated on. Kramer wanted to watch and wanted somebody to go with him. He says, "C'mon, c'mon. Go with me." We're sitting in the coffee shop and I go, "All right, all right, I'll go with you. Let me just finish this coffee and we'll go watch them slice this fat bastard up." That is not the type of thing that lead characters in successful sitcoms say. It's not what you would call likable, at least not in the traditional network sense. But that's what's great about the show. We're at the point where people understand the characters as human beings and they'll accept that. What makes it fun for me is being that honest—because that's what I would say in real life—without hurting my likability.

PLAYBOY: You've said that after five seasons you're gone. Time magazine recently posited that your show might be around for 10.

SEINFELD: I can guarantee you we won't do 10. I don't want to be in people's faces. This show is going to be off way sooner than anyone would believe.

> "I'm annoyed. But if you're not cranky and annoyed, you can't be a comedian. Even I, though I might not seem to be, am constantly irritated. If I didn't have all these sensitivities, I'd have nothing to talk about."

PLAYBOY: So do you worry about being overexposed?

SEINFELD: Yes, I do. There are certain movies where the promotion is so well coordinated and so pervasive that, before the movie comes out, I hate it, just because they're so good at telling me about it. They've done such a complete job of selling that it breeds resentment.

PLAYBOY: And yet you've been everywhere lately.

SEINFELD: I was working yesterday with a magazine photographer, and the wardrobe woman and I were talking about this. They wanted to do a cover line on me—America Loves Jerry Seinfeld or something like that. I said, "That's not good. That's going to make people hate me. If you say that about someone, it defines a relationship with the public and then propels it to end badly. A love affair is a relationship, and that has to end badly." And she said, "It's going to end badly anyway, no matter what." That's true; It ends badly anyway. So you might as well experience the peak of passion with whatever relationship we're talking about, whether it's with a person or, in this case, a professional relationship with the public. It's going to end badly. Everything ends.

PLAYBOY: How does a Seinfeld episode evolve?

SEINFELD: Somebody comes up with an idea for a show—it could be just one line. And just hearing that one line makes you laugh. "Jerry picks up his car from the valet and there's a smell that won't come out." "Jerry and Kramer go to watch an operation, and a Junior Mint falls into the body." Virtually every show that we've done can be boiled down that way. It's not like "Jerry's nephew comes to visit for a week." That doesn't make you laugh.

PLAYBOY: What's the one-liner for "The Contest"?

SEINFELD: Jerry, George, Kramer and Elaine decide to see who can go the longest without masturbation and who can remain master of their domain.

PLAYBOY: How would you do a one-liner for a show about this interview?

SEINFELD: We already did that. It's "The Outing." A reporter overhears Jerry and George joking around and then writes that they're gay. Not that there's anything wrong with that. [*Pauses*] You know, I was thinking about that show this morning. My friend Mario was in the kitchen, because he's staying here. I was thinking, Gee, I wonder if this guy from Playboy thinks there's something going on.

PLAYBOY: Frankly, that did immediately come to mind.

SEINFELD: Oh, really? That's so funny!

PLAYBOY: Also, "Hey, he's a damn good-looking guy."

SEINFELD: [*Laughs*] Oh, that's funny. Too bad we've already done the show. No, Mario's just a comedian friend of mine.

PLAYBOY: But you've heard the rumors?

SEINFELD: Many. Somebody told me the other day that he heard I had special phone numbers for different levels of women. I don't know what the hell that meant. And obviously I've heard that I'm gay. I've been told that everybody at NBC in New York thinks I'm gay.

PLAYBOY: Now's your opportunity to state unequivocally that—

SEINFELD: I'm not gay.

PLAYBOY: When you're in the heat of passion—

SEINFELD: Do I think of men? No.

PLAYBOY: Do you fold your clothes before you have sex?

SEINFELD: No. I generally don't wear clothes during sex. Wait a second, wait a second! Are we up to the sex part?

PLAYBOY: We're getting closer.

SEINFELD: All right!

PLAYBOY: Has a guy ever approached you?

SEINFELD: Once, in Rome. I decided to take a trip to Europe on my own, to see if I could meet people. This was a complete miscalculation of my personality. I don't talk to anyone. I spent 10 days there without having one conversation, except with this guy. I was so thrilled to have someone to talk to, and I didn't realize that he was hitting on me. But then it became obvious.

PLAYBOY: Is this misperception part of the reason that you did "The Outing" episode?

SEINFELD: No. That was actually Larry Charles's idea. He's our supervising producer. And when I heard it, not only did I think it was a great idea on its own but I also thought, perfect! It's not something I'm uncomfortable with. I used to be. When you're younger, if someone thinks you're gay you get really upset about it. But now I just laugh. It means people are thinking too much about you.

PLAYBOY: Why do you take on topics like masturbation, nipples on Christmas cards and bad smells when other shows don't?

SEINFELD: If I may be so immodest, it takes some pretty skillful writing to do these things and make them comfortable for people to watch on a mass level. Anybody can write a funny show about masturbation. But can you do it in an artful way that offends no one and, in fact, is even funnier than if you had come right out and talked about it? It takes skill. And when we re-ran that show last May we got our highest rating ever.

PLAYBOY: It's a classic show. Right up there with the birth of Little Ricky.

SEINFELD: And, of course, the first time Little Ricky jerked off.

PLAYBOY: Why did you think you could pull it off?

SEINFELD: I'll ignore your choice of phrase there. If it's something no one else has done before, it's challenging.

PLAYBOY: Were you just trying to see if you could get it past the censors?

SEINFELD: We're not trying to get away with anything. That's a completely different sensibility. I want to see if I can do what I want to do without pushing people's moral envelope, or whatever. And if we can't, then we don't do it. We wanted to do a show in which Elaine would be stuck in a subway and miss her stop, and be on her way to Harlem. Kind of explore her fear of having to get off the subway in Harlem. We couldn't find a way to do it without people getting the wrong impression. It was coming off racist. It was too small a needle to thread, so we abandoned it.

PLAYBOY: How did you hook up with the show's co-creator, Larry David?

SEINFELD: We've known each other since about 1976, 1977. We were both doing stand-up. But stand-up isn't his form. It's too crass for what he does. Larry has a brilliant flair for staging and direction. There is no show without him. He has, more than me, created this enterprise. My skill has been to help him interpret his ideas. He filters things through me. I contribute lines and jokes.

PLAYBOY: Do you wish you could have done it all by yourself?

SEINFELD: No. I have stand-up for that. I'm not out for the credit. I'm just glad to be doing something that's not bad TV.

PLAYBOY: What do you watch on TV?

SEINFELD: I could never watch sitcoms before I started doing one. But now they're really interesting because I see what they're trying to do, where they're succeeding, where they're failing. It used to be only The Honeymooners, sports, news, animal shows.

PLAYBOY: The Discovery Channel?

SEINFELD: Yeah. Shark Week. I always love how one animal is the star each week. And you want him to kill whatever he's trying to kill because you're on his side. If it's the lion, you want him to get that boar. The next week it's about boars. Now you're hoping that the boar gets away from the lion. Your loyalty is so fickle with these animal shows.

PLAYBOY: What did you watch as a kid?

SEINFELD: Rocky and Bullwinkle, Jonny Quest, Spider-Man, Batman. Flipper was a big favorite. Comedy-wise, Ed Sullivan, Red Skelton, Jonathan Winters, the Smothers Brothers.

PLAYBOY: Was yours a happy childhood?

SEINFELD: I had a lot of fun. I rode my bike a lot, went swimming. I was a Cub Scout. I had a Schwinn Sting Ray, blue metallic with, of course, the banana seat. The first one in Harbor Green to have one. The other kids went nuts. I was very proud of that.

PLAYBOY: What did you want as a kid that you couldn't get?

SEINFELD: The Schwinn Sting Ray. And once I got it, I was very happy. It's pretty much the same with the Porsche. At about 13, I realized I wanted a Porsche, and I was unhappy until I got it. Now I have it and I'm happy.

PLAYBOY: What's next?

SEINFELD: Nothing. I'm set.

PLAYBOY: How were you with girls?

SEINFELD: Uneventful. I kind of withdrew from a lot of social activity. I didn't like group mentality and group behavior. I wanted to focus in on one person. I wanted to tell that person what I think about nuances and details and substructures. And you don't do that in groups.

PLAYBOY: Not when you're just eight years old.

SEINFELD: And even now you don't. You go to parties and it's all breezy bullshitting, chitchatting. I like that up to a point, but then I'm bored by it. I want to sit with somebody and get down to the nuts and bolts.

PLAYBOY: When you're at a party, where do you stand?

SEINFELD: I'll tell you what happens when I go to a party. I'll open the door and I'll walk in. And I'll keep walking—and it usually won't be far—until I hit a spot where someone stops me or I see someone I know and I start talking. That is the spot I will stay in for the entire party. I sometimes wonder: Why can't I get deeper into the room?

PLAYBOY: Any clue?

SEINFELD: I guess it's because I immediately try to make the best of the situation I'm in. I think that's a key component of my personality. I'm not as interested in changing my situation as I am in improving the one I have, which I think is good. I mean, I always do the best I can with what I have.

PLAYBOY: Is that your philosophy of life?

SEINFELD: No, it just occurred to me. But I'd like to change that. I would like to walk through more of the room and be at four or five different places by the end of the party. [Looks down at his new sneakers] The tongue on this shoe is really short. And you know what? That makes or breaks a shoe in my book. Look at how short that is. That is no goddamn good. This will never be one of my favorites.

PLAYBOY: You've said that small talk is excruciating for you. Do you give the impression that you don't want to talk to people?

SEINFELD: I generally don't want to. Most people are not equipped to discuss the things I want to discuss, which is sneaker tongues and

things like that. They haven't thought about it, they have no ideas about it. That's why Larry David and I just go on forever. He's equipped to discuss anything.

PLAYBOY: Would you talk about sneaker tongues if somebody else brought it up?

SEINFELD: Yeah, I love it. I light up when somebody else brings it up. I go, "Okay, now I have a player here. Let's talk."

PLAYBOY: You're always buying and wearing new pairs of sneakers. Do you have a sneaker fetish?

SEINFELD: I've always liked sneakers—that was something I responded to even at six years old. I drove my mother crazy about getting me sneakers. She wouldn't let me wear them in the winter. She would set a day when I was allowed to start wearing sneakers again.

PLAYBOY: What kind did you wear?

SEINFELD: Keds. My favorite ones were the dark-blue kind that you could get only in the city. On Long Island they had only black. I've got a picture of me wearing them in my first grade class. Every other kid in the picture has regular shoes on. I'm in high tops.

PLAYBOY: Apparently this runs deeper than anyone suspected.

SEINFELD: All comedians have an obsession about their feet. If I see a comedian during the day with a pair of shoes on, I stop him, grab him and go, "What is going on?" You just never see it. Comedians hate shoes.

PLAYBOY: Why?

SEINFELD: Comedians like to be comfortable. But more than that, it's clinging to your youthful mood. I always wanted to be ready to play ball if anyone suggested it. I didn't want to have to go home and change. Your shoes are important because they define your relationship to the earth. I like to have something playful on my feet.

PLAYBOY: We hear that you don't keep them if they get as much as a tiny scuff.

SEINFELD: Another media-driven scandal. Not true. But I do give old pairs away to the less fortunate—who at this point are pretty much everybody.

PLAYBOY: How many pairs do you have?

SEINFELD: Right now I'm a little low. Probably 15 or 20. I really need to get some more.

PLAYBOY: Let's investigate a couple of your other notable quirks. What about your love of flossing?

SEINFELD: More bullshit. I flossed after lunch one day at the show, and a magazine writer decided that meant I'm obsessed with flossing. I floss twice a day. That's what my dentist told me to do, so I do it.

PLAYBOY: What about your involvement with Scientology?

SEINFELD: I took a couple courses a number of years ago that I thought were fabulous. I learned a lot and I had a good experience with it.

PLAYBOY: You're not an unwitting dupe of the church?

SEINFELD: No, I've always had the skill of extracting the essence of any subject I study, be it meditation, yoga, Scientology, Judaism, Zen. Whatever it is, I go in to get what I need. To me, these are supermarkets. I go in to get my supplies, then I leave.

PLAYBOY: Most of your friends are comics. Why is that?

SEINFELD: I love funny people.

PLAYBOY: We hear time and time again that most comics are venal, self-centered and not nice.

SEINFELD: There are guys driving bread trucks who fit the same description. I feel comfortable with comics. We understand one another. Here's a good question for you the next time you interview a comic. If you had to be stuck in a room for the rest of your life with one person, and either you would be funny or that person would be funny, which would you prefer? That's a good one, isn't it?

PLAYBOY: What's the answer?

SEINFELD: I would prefer that the other person be funny. To not laugh is worse than to not be funny.

PLAYBOY: Many comics might choose the other option.

SEINFELD: Not the good ones. If you're up there for yourself, you're not as good as if you're up there for them. That's how I break them down. That's how I cut the comedy community in half. For whose benefit are you onstage?

PLAYBOY: Is that why you've said there should be no stars in comedy?

SEINFELD: Yes. Stars can succeed by concealing who they are. Comedians can't.

PLAYBOY: But you've become a star.

SEINFELD: Well, not in my mind—and that's the one we're talking about. Do I look like a star to you?

PLAYBOY: Nope, just a regular guy. How have the experiences of your friends who have become famous prepared you for the change in your life?

SEINFELD: They haven't. Jay Leno is really the only one I knew well, and I watched him take off. But you have no idea how you're going to respond to it. Jay and I are very different. Jay's the ultimate public-service guy. I mean, when he gets 30 calls about a joke that was offensive, he calls every one of those people and finds out why or apologizes. I don't respond to the public that way. This is my thing, take it or leave it.

PLAYBOY: Is it true that you and Jay sit around and critique comics just for fun?

SEINFELD: All comedians do it. Comedians gossip endlessly. They love to bullshit their lives away; that's why they became comedians.

> "I'd like to play the London Palladium when I'm 100, just like George Burns."

PLAYBOY: Weren't you once considered as the guest host for David Letterman?

SEINFELD: He said that one time in an interview. I don't think that was ever at a serious stage. He mentioned me as a fill-in if he were on vacation or something.

PLAYBOY: Are you interested in being a talk-show host?

SEINFELD: No. I could never maintain the illusion that I really give a damn about when this person's movie is coming out, or show any interest in the person. The brilliance of Letterman, the genius of Letterman, is that he can conduct an interview with someone he does not respect without compromising himself and, at the same time, he lets us know how he feels. I'm amazed by that. I could never play that edge the way he does.

PLAYBOY: Explain the differences between Jay and Dave.

SEINFELD: Jay reads the books. Every day they screen the movie of the guest who's coming on the next day. Leno does incredible research. He is like John Riggins of the Washington Redskins. He was the kind of guy to whom you would give the ball and he would plow into that line over and over again.

PLAYBOY: What about Dave?

SEINFELD: Letterman's a little more offbeat. Letterman is like Crazy Legs Hirsch.

PLAYBOY: Since both Letterman and Leno are your pals, how did you feel about their jockeying for position before Dave decided to go with CBS?

SEINFELD: It was as uncomfortable for me as it was for them. But they were cool about it. They understand the inherent brutality of show business, and that was just one of those episodes. Two wildebeests are walking down the street and the lion's in the bushes. Somebody's going to get eaten. But it seems to have worked out well for both.

PLAYBOY: Did you talk to Dave and Jay during the battle?

SEINFELD: Yeah. They both felt it was terrible that it had to be like that. But friends compete in sports all the time. Look at Jordan and Barkley. There is no acrimony. Luckily, they're two professional guys who

are fairly secure.

PLAYBOY Is it difficult to choose which show you're going to appear on?

SEINFELD No. Being on Carson was like being on your dad's show. Being on Letterman or with Leno is like being on your friend's show. I kind of miss the fear. I don't feel out of place anymore. I miss putting together the suit and tie, very conservative so as not to offend.

PLAYBOY Now you don't depend on talk-show appearances for a living.

SEINFELD Now who gives a shit?

PLAYBOY There are some who are afraid to go on Dave's show.

SEINFELD But that's just a matter of being funny. With the Carson show there were all these other points of protocol that you worried about: the OK finger versus the not-OK finger at the end of your set, the suit and the idea of, "What if I went on without a tie? Oh, my God!" It was like throwing a Molotov cocktail. I don't think about things like that now.

PLAYBOY How many times were you on with Carson?

SEINFELD Thirty.

PLAYBOY Did he wave you over to the couch the first time?

SEINFELD No, it was like the fourth or fifth.

PLAYBOY Was it devastating?

SEINFELD No, I knew this was the process. I wasn't one of these phenoms where the guy gets called over his first time, hits a home run in his first at-bat. I always did well, but they have to warm up to you. They tell you, "Mr. Carson thought you were very funny." That type of thing.

PLAYBOY And no one inspires that kind of fear now?

SEINFELD I can't put myself in the position of just starting out anymore. Now, if I did The Tonight Show and they said, "Mr. Leno didn't feel that your material was strong enough," I'd say, "I didn't think he was so funny either."

PLAYBOY What about you and Howard Stern?

SEINFELD We have a lot of fun.

PLAYBOY You have a lot of fun with a guy who recently said he wishes your house would fall off the mountain, that you would get cancer and die?

SEINFELD Yeah, he's funny. People don't understand the Howard Stern character. We were laughing our asses off.

PLAYBOY Wait. Supposedly, his feelings were really hurt because of something you said about him in an interview.

SEINFELD He was offended. He's a sensitive guy, if you can believe that. I called him an amusing jerk. So I went on his show and told him that I stand by my comment. We had this really hostile exchange. Then, as soon as he'd go to a commercial, we'd both be laughing. That show is all playacting.

PLAYBOY Was that all set up from the beginning?

SEINFELD It's just kind of understood. He makes fun of me, I make fun of him. It's friends ragging on each other for the fun of it. Hey, if I really thought he didn't like me, why would I give a damn about him and go on his show?

PLAYBOY What does Howard want to know that you won't tell him?

SEINFELD He's always asking me about dates and women.

PLAYBOY How did you feel when he grilled your ex-girlfriend, comic Carol Leifer, about your sex life?

SEINFELD I was a little embarrassed about that, especially since we broke up 17 years ago.

PLAYBOY She said you were good.

SEINFELD Yeah, she was just being sweet. Nobody remembers.

PLAYBOY And he grilled her not only about your sex life but also about your penis size.

SEINFELD Hey, that's kind of personal. Come to think of it, I like Don Imus better. And I mention that because I know it will really irritate Howard, which is always gratifying to me.

PLAYBOY This might be the perfect time to interject a guest question from a young woman—and fan—who watched "The Contest" and wanted to know if in fact you are the master of your domain.

SEINFELD No. My empire has crumbled.

PLAYBOY She wanted specifics on frequency. And when—in the morning? In the evening?

SEINFELD I'll need her home number.

PLAYBOY Creams? Oils?

SEINFELD Well, we're definitely into it now. Tell her that the show, while being lifelike and entertaining, is basically an exercise in fiction. I'll tell you something interesting about me. It's probably my biggest secret, the biggest skeleton in my closet. I didn't discover masturbation until after I lost my virginity. I don't understand how everybody else knew about it and I didn't. Nobody told me about it. I don't know how they found out about it. I didn't know this technique was available to me. I don't know how it happened, but somehow I was absent that day. And when I discovered it, I thought, Well, that's the end of that. I'm never going to get upset about a woman ever again!

PLAYBOY How soon after your first sexual encounter did you learn—

SEINFELD Right after. Nah, just kidding.

PLAYBOY So who told you?

SEINFELD It was my college roommate. We were talking one day, and he told me.

PLAYBOY Were you embarrassed?

SEINFELD Are you kidding? I would love to tell people about this. What a tremendous gift to give another human being, to tell them, "You know, here's what you can do ..."

PLAYBOY Is that basically how it happened?

SEINFELD That's a funny version of it.

PLAYBOY Which parent told you about sex, and what did he or she tell you?

SEINFELD I don't really remember how I learned. They said they showed me a book or played me a record or something. They swore they told me all about it, but I don't recall it. I think I learned from that book, the David Reuben book, Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid to Ask). I found a copy when I was in high school, and that was helpful.

PLAYBOY Don't get excited. This isn't the sex part, but since you brought it up, when did you lose your virginity?

SEINFELD I'm not sure whether I was 19 or 20.

PLAYBOY Not sure?

SEINFELD I'm not positive, to tell you the truth. I remember the place. I remember whom. I was in a relationship, so it wasn't a seduction.

PLAYBOY A lot of men lose their virginity at a much younger age.

SEINFELD I'm not pushy. I remember being upset about it having taken so long. Might have been 20. I should probably call it a "technical" at 19, but the red light—sorry about the metaphor—came on when I was 20. So I'm willing now to admit that as a teenager I never had sex. And I was the master of my domain. And I'll tell you this. At the age of 39, I've almost caught up with everybody else. I think I'm even.

PLAYBOY Why so late?

SEINFELD I hated the idea of upsetting a woman in any way, so the slightest amount of resistance would deter me. I had no persistence at all. Still don't, really. If she is at all reticent, I'm out of there. It kills the mood for me. I don't want to sell anybody anything. It's one area of my life where I'm extremely—

PLAYBOY Shy?

SEINFELD Yeah. Still very shy about it. I'm not pushy.

PLAYBOY Of course, now you don't have to be.

SEINFELD No, I still have to be.

PLAYBOY How much has fame changed the equation?

SEINFELD It's changed it, but it hasn't really improved it. In some ways, women are put off by it. They think I'm dating millions of women, they think they won't be special. They think I'll take them for granted.

PLAYBOY True?

SEINFELD No.

PLAYBOY Are you willing to make the first move now?

SEINFELD Yes, I am. I feel confident enough to do that now. [Gets up and goes into the kitchen] Do you mind if I do these dishes?

PLAYBOY You like doing dishes?

SEINFELD I like the water and I like the soap [*soaps some glasses and plates*]

PLAYBOY Do you like to iron?

SEINFELD No. I like vacuuming, though. I like the way the carpet looks after I'm done. I like those lines the wheels make.

PLAYBOY While we're in the kitchen, maybe we should mention your fascination with cereal. The Seinfeld kitchen is jammed with cereal boxes. You have stashes in your Los Angeles and New York homes. Why?

SEINFELD It's the first thing I could make when I was a kid. I was proud of it. I love milk.

PLAYBOY So cereal is just a means to an end?

SEINFELD I think so. I really like anything with milk.

PLAYBOY Your face will soon be on a box of cereal, right?

SEINFELD Yeah, Kellogg's low-fat granola. [Takes a small package from the cereal box] I love things like this. They put the raisins in a special packet. I guess it keeps them moist and juicy.

PLAYBOY: What's your favorite cereal?

SEINFELD I constantly change my allegiances. Right now I'm in this Cheerios mode. I'm sure the Kellogg's people won't be happy to hear that. [Scrambling] Cornflakes, though—you really can't beat cornflakes. If you had to have one cereal the rest of your life, it would have to be cornflakes.

PLAYBOY Let's turn to your cereal days as a comic. When did you know you had made it?

SEINFELD When I turned in my waiter's apron in September of 1976. I was working at Brew and Burger on Third and 53rd. Ten to two—lunch. I got a gig emceeing at the Comic Strip. I already had one night, then I got another night, and it was like 35 bucks a night. I thought I could make it on 70 bucks a week. So I turned in the apron. I went out to visit my parents. I remember standing on the platform of the Long Island Railroad in Massapequa. That was the highest moment of my career. I was a comedian. I had made it.

PLAYBOY Has anything compared to that since then?

SEINFELD No. That was the transition from man to superman.

PLAYBOY You've always said your dad was a funny guy. Did he think you had a shot at a career in comedy?

SEINFELD Oh, yeah. He was extremely encouraging about it. He was a salesman, and that's a similar type of life. You're really not doing any legitimate kind of work, you're just making a living talking people into things. That isn't too much different from what a comedian does.

PLAYBOY What did he sell?

SEINFELD Signs.

PLAYBOY Signs? Seinfeld?

SEINFELD A coincidence. Anyway, I had been doing comedy for a few months by then. My parents were fine with it. They weren't quite sure what I was doing. They really didn't know how serious I was about it. But they always took everything in stride. Their life didn't revolve around me. If I was happy, they were happy.

PLAYBOY Whom did their lives revolve around?

SEINFELD Everybody did what they wanted to do. We were all just kind of roommates. My parents never really had families. My mom grew up in an orphanage and my father left home when he was young. They got married late in life—they were both in their mid- to late 30s. They were independent people.

PLAYBOY Would you call yours an intimate family?

SEINFELD No. We went on vacations together and we always had dinner together, but it wasn't that kind of cloying, got-to-talk-every-day thing. My mother doesn't call me every day. There was plenty of breathing room in the family. It was a healthy atmosphere.

PLAYBOY What is your definition of intimacy?

SEINFELD There are certain families in which people are all over one another. They look like newborn puppies. It's too much.

PLAYBOY Would you describe yourself as an intimate person?

SEINFELD It's hard to be intimate all by yourself. But I'm comfortable with intimacy, if that's what you're asking. I just haven't been involved with anyone seriously in quite a while. I have had a number of legitimate relationships, but the past few years I haven't. I've been too busy and it's been too difficult. And sometimes I wonder if I've lost the knack of it. Of course, I'm minimizing the whole experience by using the word knack. But I don't think so. No human being is immune to love and how it can change you.

PLAYBOY Ever been in love?

SEINFELD Yeah, a few times.

PLAYBOY What's the shortest amount of time it's taken you to say "I love you"?

SEINFELD A month.

PLAYBOY Were you holding out?

SEINFELD No, it seemed about right. I'm into timing.

PLAYBOY Speaking of timing, you're 39, straight, never been married. What's going on?

SEINFELD I've been busy.

PLAYBOY: Well, maybe this will make things easier. We have some phone numbers we've been asked to pass along.

SEINFELD [Looks at slips of paper] What is this? Where'd you get these?

PLAYBOY This one is from a woman who said, "Tell Jerry I'm a nice Jewish girl." And this is from a woman who—

SEINFELD What do these women think? Why would I call someone like this? I don't know who they are. [Flustered] I mean, this is really quite mind-boggling. I find this astounding. I don't know them, they know me. Do they understand that TV works only one way? They get to see me, but I don't get to see them. This basic fact of electronics seems to get past a lot of people. It's beyond me. I don't know, maybe some people are that indiscriminate. I'm extremely careful about who I spend my time with.

PLAYBOY The tabloids had a field day with one of your recent dates—with a 17-year-old.

SEINFELD: I was in a tabloid rocket to the moon. I'm telling you, that was too fun. That was so much fun. That was just absolutely hilarious to me.

PLAYBOY: Excuse us. We need to get a pan to catch the dripping sarcasm.

SEINFELD: [*Laughs*] I guess I haven't quite adjusted to celebrityhood because it's still hard for me to believe that anyone gives a damn who the hell I go out with or what I do.

So anyway, I met this girl, Shoshanna. She's a very sweet girl and she's very pretty. I didn't know how old she was. I knew she wasn't 40. I took her to a basketball game and that was the whole thing.

PLAYBOY: Did you meet her in the park like they say?

SEINFELD: Yeah, but the rest of it is all—

"I didn't discover masturbation until after I lost my virginity. I don't understand how everybody else knew about it and I didn't."

PLAYBOY: Is she 18?
SEINFELD: She's 18 now.
PLAYBOY: When did she tell you her age?
SEINFELD: When the article came out.
PLAYBOY. You took her to the basketball game and now the tabloids are calling you a cradle snatcher.
SEINFELD. Cradle snatcher! It was a wonderful article. I couldn't believe how nice they were about it.
PLAYBOY. Nice?
SEINFELD. Everybody was saying, "I don't see anything wrong with it. If they like each other . . ." My manager couldn't believe it. He said I'm bulletproof even in the tabloids. They had every chance really to stick the knife in and they didn't do it. They could have said anything: I'm taking advantage of her, she doesn't know what's going on, her parents are upset, my mother wanted to disown me. They could have made up anything.
PLAYBOY. How did Shoshanna feel about all the attention?
SEINFELD. Didn't bother her a bit.
PLAYBOY. Kids today.
SEINFELD. The great thing is you can go out on a date and pick up a little babysitting money on the side. That pays for the pizza. She's a very nice girl.
PLAYBOY. What have your friends said about this?
SEINFELD. It's really strange. The reactions ran the absolute gamut from horrified to just busting buttons with pride that they know me. Guys I hadn't heard from in years called to say, "Congratulations! Good for you." Women I know wouldn't even call me back. My assistant punched me. She saw me and literally punched me, she was so mad. It was reviled by women in their 30s and by Jay Leno.
PLAYBOY. Leno?
SEINFELD. Leno was just terrified. To him any potential public-relations imbroglio, any appearance of impropriety, is the most terrifying thing in the world. He was scared for me, just out of concern as a friend.
PLAYBOY. Did he do anything in the monologue?
SEINFELD. No, he would never do anything like that. But my mother was thrilled because Shoshanna is Jewish and Syrian. My mother's Syrian. And all my aunts and uncles on the Syrian side, this is what they expect. They figure 15, 16 is the right age [for a woman] for me, because that's the way they do it in Syria. So they're going, "Eighteen? She's a little over the hill, but if you like her, . . ."

My women friends, some of them were really hostile about it. They didn't like it. First of all, they think I look for this. Like this was an ambition of mine. But the fact is, I don't meet that many women I like, period. So when I like someone, I don't care about her race, creed or national origin. If I like her, I don't care. I don't discriminate. If she's 18, if she's intelligent, that's fine.
PLAYBOY. So, is it love?
SEINFELD. No, no, it was just a couple cups of coffee.
PLAYBOY: And a basketball game.
SEINFELD: I'm also dating a woman who's 39. I'm trying to pander to whatever personal prejudice people have. See, the thing is, my own age isn't really real to me. I look in the mirror and I just don't feel 39. I don't feel any different than I was when I was 23. And I don't look that much different. So it's weird. Look, I don't have impossible qualifications. All that I want in a woman is sweet, smart and sexy.

PLAYBOY. Frankly, we're surprised you weren't more careful about going out in public with Shoshanna. The walls have cameras.
SEINFELD. Can you believe it? Can you believe how naive I can be?
PLAYBOY: What's your idea of a fun date?
SEINFELD. To me the ultimate date is dinner and a movie. My fantasies are all of normalcy, because I don't get to do a lot of these things. As you know, I'm a great fan of the mundane anyway. So, to me, dinner and a movie—I can't imagine a more fabulous evening than to have enough time to do that and to have scheduled that so it works. And then you have coffee later. That's just orgasmic for me.
PLAYBOY. Having gone from a successful stand-up career to this saturation in the media, how has your popularity, on a percentage basis, increased the number of female opportunities available to you?
SEINFELD. [Laughs] We're getting there! I feel it coming now. The sex part! Yeah! The sex part! You can't keep it from me any longer. You can't hide. This is the sex part. [Laughs] No, the percentage is the same. It's all women, 100 percent. A percentage increase in the number of female opportunities? Hard to believe we're not in a Citibank board meeting here. I know you want an answer to this question, but here's the problem: Along with the saturation there's a price. And that price is the enemy of all living things: time. I can go out on a date maybe two or three times a month, 10 months out of the year. That's a maximum. It's a funny situation. You get yourself to this point in life where you have a nice job, a nice car, a nice place to live, you know where the good restaurants are—and you can't go.
PLAYBOY. Is that a problem for you?
SEINFELD: No, it's a problem for my dates. That's why I'm not involved—the kind of woman who would put up with that is not the kind of woman I want.

"My fantasies are all of normalcy, because I don't get to do a lot of these things."

You know, I never imagined being at this particular point in show business. Currently, I can do almost anything I want. I can meet almost anybody I want. I'm what they call "hot" right now, this second. Come back tomorrow, it could all be different. I have to manage that. It's a good word, heat, because it has a destructive quality to it. I'm careful about it. The fire heats the home and can also burn it down, as my father used to love to say. But as long as I'm at this apex, I want to experience it to the maximum and make the most of it.
PLAYBOY. Does this mean you'll be a lonely guy for a while longer?
SEINFELD. No. I'm never lonely. Even when I'm alone I'm not lonely. That's another reason I'm a good comic: A lot of time alone never bothered me. By the way, I would like to meet all the women I'm in this issue with. It seems like I should. I think when people read an issue they assume that all the people in the magazine know one another. Like they were all there that day. One guy's getting interviewed, the Playmate's getting photographed, someone else is doing a wine ad and there're a bunch of football players in some other room getting their picture taken. And they're all at the Mansion. I think that's the Playboy image.
PLAYBOY. Maybe we should have a party in your honor and invite everyone in the issue. Will you come?
SEINFELD. Absolutely. Besides, I've never been to the Mansion. And I really think you owe me that.
PLAYBOY. And something else, as well.
SEINFELD. Yeah, the sex question. Have we done it? I think everyone is looking forward to the sex question.
PLAYBOY. We're sorry, but we have run out of time.

The lovely Gizelle Azure

Instagram **@gizelleazure**

Photography by **Mike Cohen | @mikecohenphotos**

How do you usually begin your day? I usually begin with a good cup of coffee and some energizing music, which are my morning essentials to start my day

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would it be and why? If I could spend a day doing anything I wanted, I'd be lounging on a exotic tropical beach, in my bikini, sipping a delicious cocktail, and soaking up the sun.

What are your favorite ways to unwind and relax when you're not working or traveling? I love a cozy night with a good book or an exciting movie Add in some candles, a bubble bath, and a glass of wine, and you've got the perfect recipe for relaxation

Do you have any hidden talents? If so, what are they? My hidden talent? I trained as a professional wrestler and have been to a few countries to perform

What is the best place you have ever been to in the world? So far I love being in the EU because you can jet around and experience different cultures and people within an hour

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? My biggest dreams include creating another successful business, gracing the cover of Playboy, and showcasing my wrestling life for AEW (all elite wrestling) or WWE

3 things that you can't go a day without. I can't go a day without a bit of lipstick, my favorite Chanel perfume, and, of course, my phone A girl needs to look good, smell good, and stay connected

Looking back, what advice would you give to your younger self? I'd tell my younger self to be fearless and follow her heart. Life is too short to play it safe Embrace every moment and never let anyone dull your moments

What advice would you give to all the women out there when it comes to love and relationships? When it comes to love, be true to yourself and don't settle for anything less than what you require. Trust your instincts, communicate openly, and always remember that you deserve the world.

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner, and what do you value the most? I find conf dence, a great smile, a great sense of humor, and kindness incredibly attractive. What I value most in a partner is someone who can make me laugh, make me feel safe, and loves me for who I am

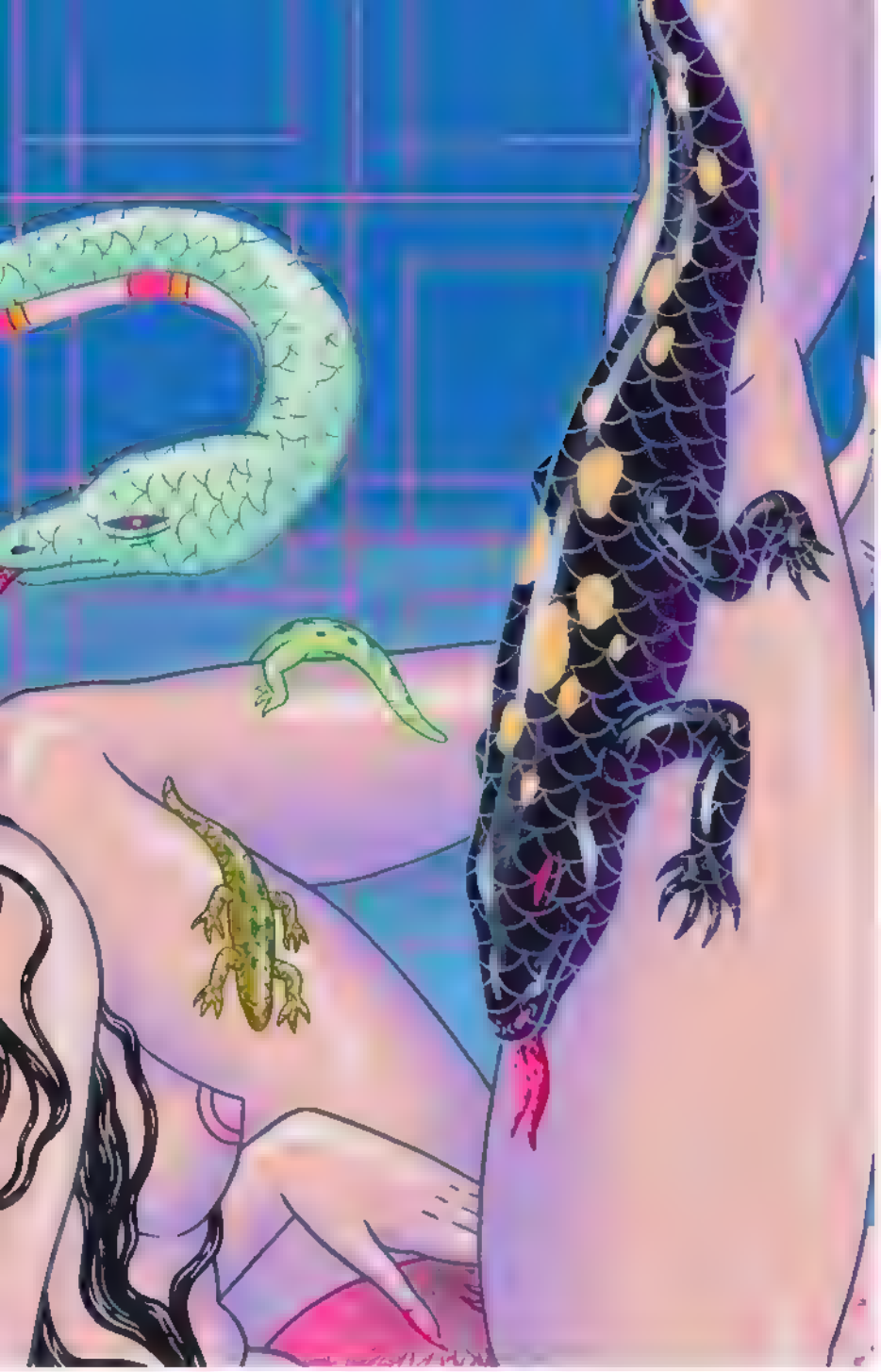
DISCOVER YOUR NAUGHTY FANTASIES

SPICYMAGS.XYZ

SPICYMAGS.XYZ

UNLIMITED SATISFACTION
ONE LOW PRICE

Meet the Anonymous Artists Behind the Sexy Art You're Double-Tapping on Instagram



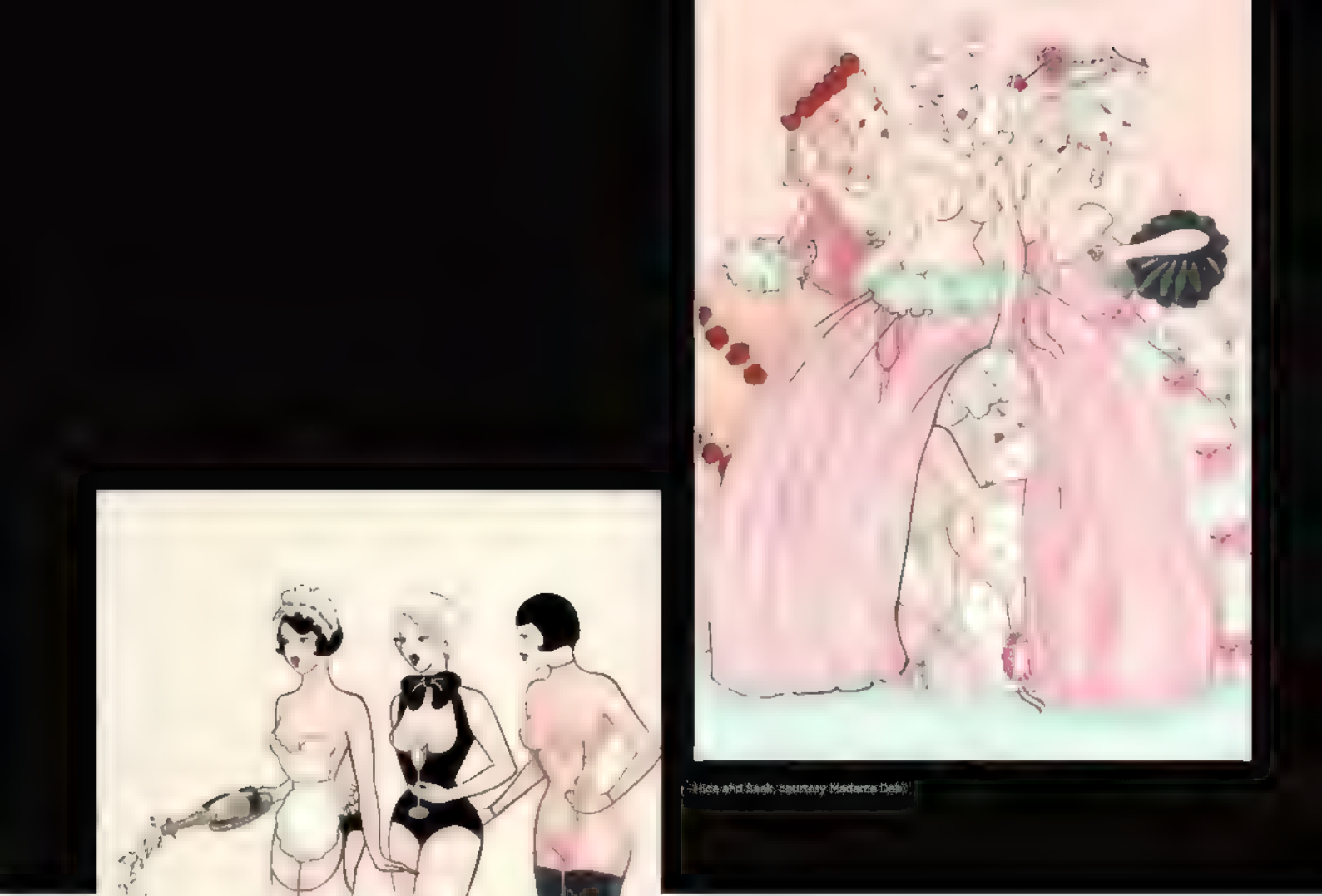
Anonymity helps erotic artists go deeper, but censorship often halts their success

BY **CHLOE OLEWITZ**

PHOTO BY **KRISTEN LIU-WONG**

It's all in the scroll. From shocking line drawings to delicate watercolors and full-frontal nudity to suggestive sensuality, erotic art is ubiquitous on Instagram. There's something for everyone, but much of the art shares a common thread. Its creator is anonymous.

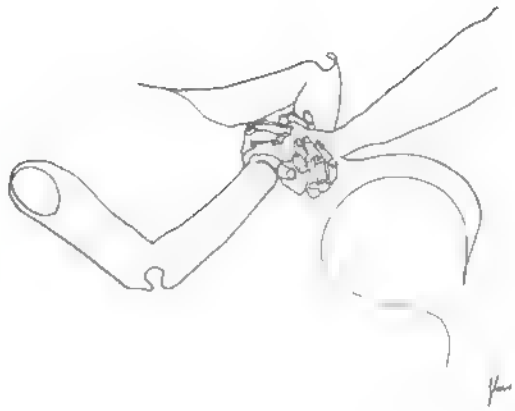
Art historian Amalia Russiello says anonymity has served to protect artists from harsh repercussions throughout history. Artists in all eras have suffered physical violence, imprisonment or ostracism for crossing accepted social boundaries. "[Punishments] didn't just depend on the historical period, but also on the country and political situation," says Russiello, who also creates erotic art.



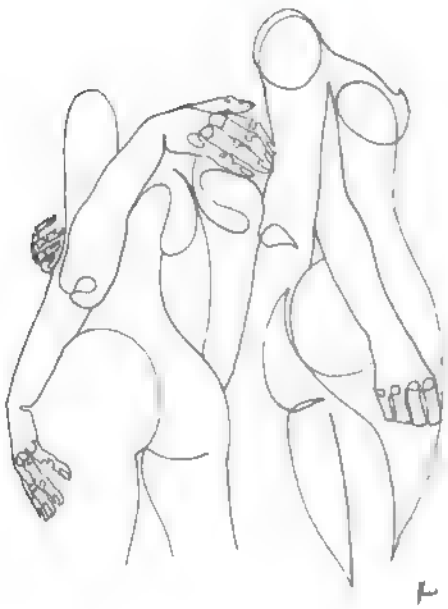
Champagne s Slave, courtesy Madame Dabi

Many artists still use anonymity to protect themselves, working under pseudonyms or invented identities. But even for artists who are safe from political persecution, anonymity has other benefits. Some artists use anonymity or pseudonyms to separate their professional reputations from their more risque explorations. Russiello herself creates erotic art under the moniker Madame Dabi. "When one chooses to eliminate his or her name by choice, an enigma is created," Russiello says. "The illustration is charged with mystery, giving the observer's imagination the task of explaining the message independently of the image of the artist."

Other artists commit completely to their pseudonyms, obscuring any connection between lived identity and fabricated persona. Flowsofly, an Austrian artist who uses they/them pronouns as part of their mask of anonymity, says they first took to Instagram in 2015 as part of a personal challenge to post one sensual line drawing every day. Flowsofly wanted the freedom to play with their new style separate from their professional design career, and anonymity made that possible. Their anonymous account became so successful that in May 2020, they quit their day job to work as a full-time artist.



Courtesy Flowsofly



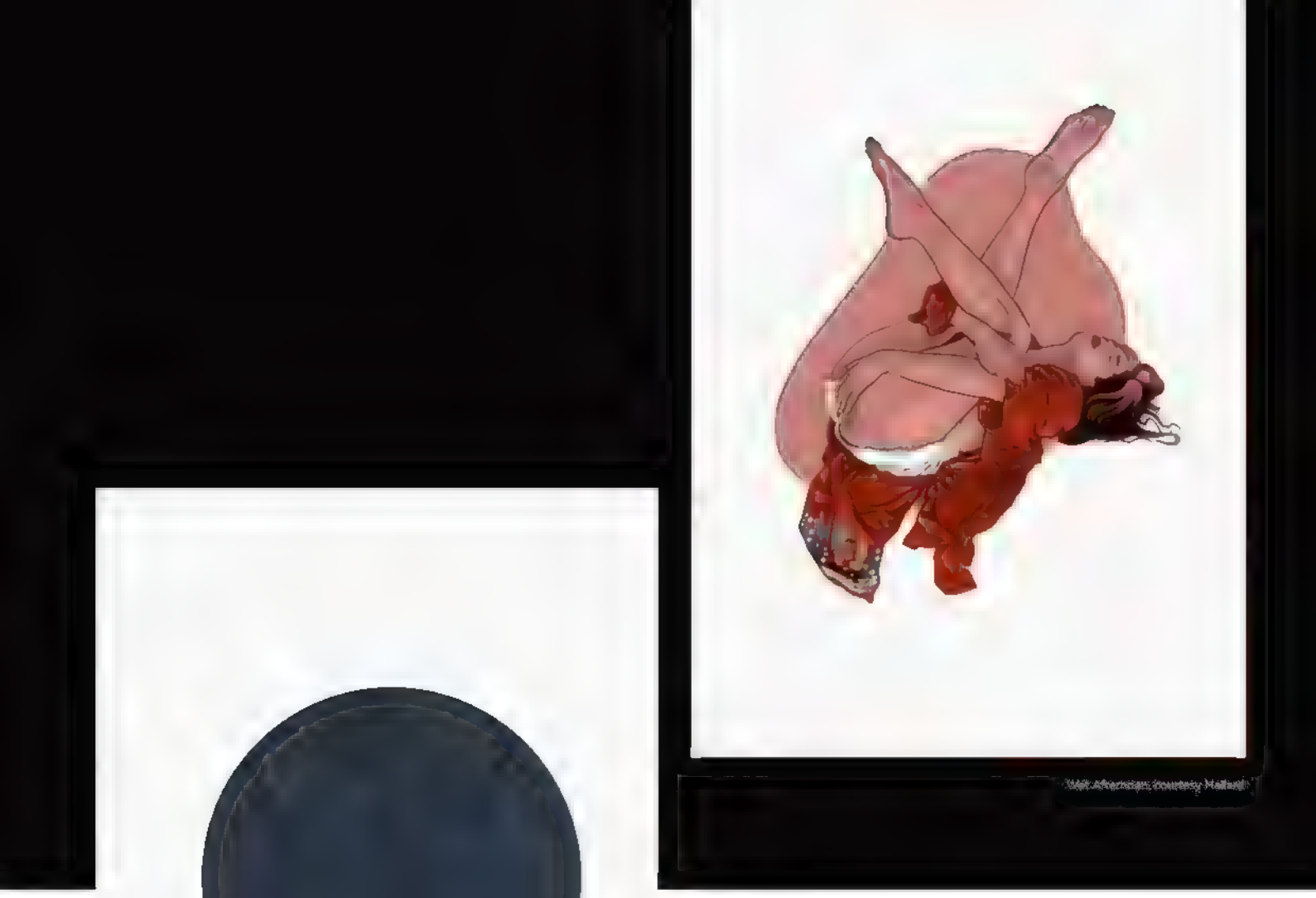
Courtesy Flowsofly

Flowsofly has maintained anonymity, even after gaining traction and going full-time, because it helps them keep the focus on the art rather than their personal identity. Viewers often spend a lot of energy seeking to understand an artist in order to better appreciate their work. In an effort to break such associations, Flowsofly erases their identity and creates work from a range of gender perspectives, instead of centering their own gaze. They also want to encourage viewers to use their imagination to step inside the scenes. "Having an anonymous account helps people put their own interpretations into the foreground, instead of trying to interpret what they see through the artist's eye," Flowsofly says. "It's encouraging to watch two people standing in front of the same piece, seeing something different."

For other artists, the mask of anonymity serves primarily as a source of courage. Mallard, who says she hopes her mom doesn't find out about her erotic art, feels emboldened by her anonymity. It liberates her to take risks and challenge her own boundaries, because the only fallout she worries about is losing followers or dealing with aggressive comments from strangers. "Without anonymity I wouldn't draw half the things I do," she says. "There are no real-life repercussions. It's true expression and freedom."

Freedom of expression can come at a higher price for non-pseudonymous artists like Kristen Liu-Wong. Liu-Wong, who makes erotic art using her legal name, has noticed firsthand the effect of being transparent with her identity. "A lot of people put their personal baggage on you and your work," she says. "As a woman, that can quickly dissolve into unwanted advances and nasty comments. If I were an anonymous, genderless artist, I would probably get taken advantage of a lot less and I would personally feel emboldened to ask for more."

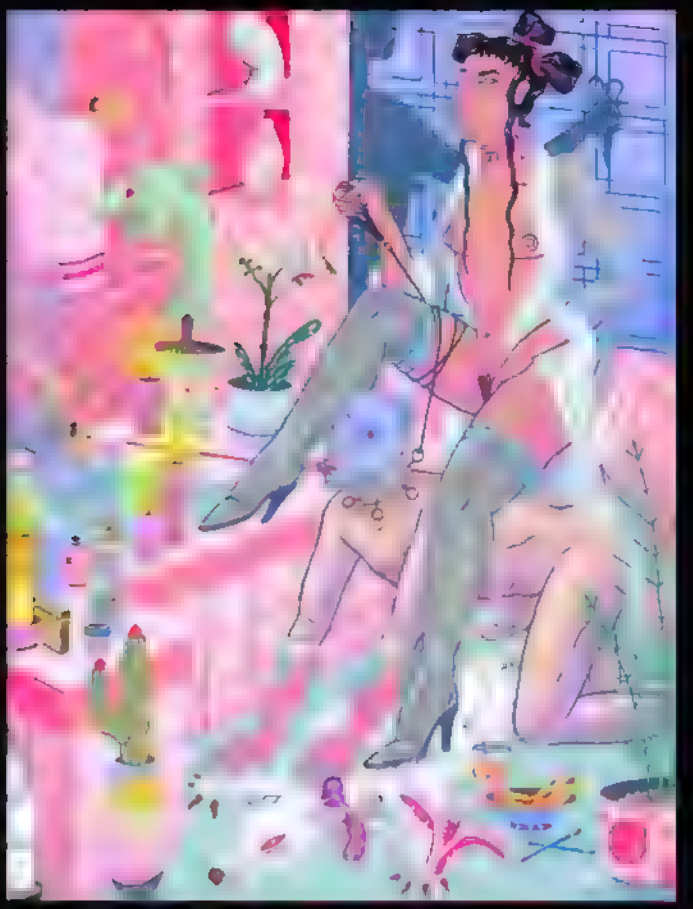
Although anonymity can protect and embolden creators, there are also downsides—especially online. It can be difficult to turn digital popularity into real-world opportunity when you're committed to remaining anonymous, a lesson Flowsofly has learned the hard way. "I've been invited to events and to do live drawing sessions. I think they would have been really fun, and they could have helped show my works to the world," they say. "But I declined. I didn't want to give up my anonymity."



WAP courtesy Maillard

For artist La Moufette, that dilemma was compounded by the question of ownership. When he started his first erotic art account on Instagram in 2015, there wasn't anything out there that resembled his work. He racked up thousands of followers seemingly overnight, but it didn't take long for copycats to start ripping off his work. They even reported La Moufette for "stealing" his own art. One of his copycats has been reposting La Moufette's original art for at least two years, but the real La Moufette can't get the fake account deleted.

In addition to battling online art theft, La Moufette also faced a series of devastating account deletions. As his popularity grew, people started reporting his work. La Moufette says his drawings were suggestive but not explicit, Instagram deleted his whole account anyway. After bouncing back quickly with a second account, La Moufette discovered that many of his fans were sex workers and porn actors. When they shared his work, the discrimination they face daily on the platform trickled down to his account. It was deleted again, and then a third time.



PentheusWasADisbeliever, courtesy Kristen Liu-Wong

With each deletion, active direct-message conversations with potential art clients vanished. "That was the most disappointing thing," he says. The account closures forced La Moufette to relinquish his anonymity. After starting over for a fourth time, he set his account to private, started posting less frequently and publicly linked to his Kai Suppel account, where he posts tattoo art under his given name.

In the course of reporting this article, the fourth La Moufette account was deleted. "I guess Instagram is no longer the place for it," Suppel says. This is the constant struggle for anonymous erotic artists on Instagram. For example, Flowsofly's account remains online and visible, but only to some, Playboy's editorial team still can't access their page.

Regards Coupables, a French artist who uses anonymity to eliminate assumptions about their identity based on their erotic illustrations, is no stranger to this pattern of censorship. Their account was deleted twice in three years. "I live in constant fear that it will happen again," they say. "I've been looking for other platforms since I lost my first account, but I feel terribly dependent and bridled. Dependent because overnight everything can disappear, and bridled because the restrictions related to the conditions of use are very strict, especially when it comes to eroticism and nudity."

Kristen Liu-Wong has also called out the stark double standard in Instagram's opaque community guidelines. "I know people who have reported child pornography, and nothing happened," she says. "But a fully censored post of mine"—Liu-Wong sometimes uses emoji to cover up for nudity she worries will get her work flagged—"can be removed twice without any consideration."

"Without anonymity I wouldn't draw half the things I do. There are no real-life repercussions. It's true expression and freedom."

Courtesy La Moufette

Some anonymous artists take censorship in stride, treating it as a cost of doing business on Instagram. Flowsofly says that usually fewer than 10 of the more than 300 images they post each year get deleted, but they hold back more explicit works out of fear of losing the account and the connection it provides to so many fans around the world.

Many erotic artists feel stuck between a rock and a hard place with Instagram. Twitter doesn't have the same visual focus, and Tumblr banned adult content in December 2018, alienating a huge community of artists and their fans. Artists are left with little recourse when it comes to theft and censorship, but they feel tied to Instagram nonetheless. Regards Coupables says they have had four Instagram posts deleted in three weeks, but still haven't found an alternative platform they feel is suitable. They still prioritize anonymity, even if it means shouldering more risk. "When it comes to sex, knowing the gender of the artist can change the interpretation of the work," they say.

Courtesy Regards Coupables

Other artists treat censorship as a matter of principle, seeing it as an attack on open and fluid representations of sexuality and sexual expression. Liu-Wong feels it's her duty to speak out against censorship specifically because of her identity as a young woman in America. "In some ways, I feel obliged to mention every single time I am censored, instead of just quietly taking it like women have had to do throughout history," she says. "I don't have to do that, so I won't."

Anonymity presents a matrix of pros and cons that make the game seem impossible to win. To art historian Russiello, anonymity also has the potential to serve as a broader statement on the medium in which it appears and on the art world at large. "The absence of a name can be read as a criticism of the art market and the system of artistic trade," she says. By erasing their identities and presenting their work on Instagram, anonymous erotic artists level a stinging commentary on the cult of personality and celebrity in the contemporary art world. If one of the core upshots of the Instagram era is that anyone can call themselves an artist, anonymous erotic artists prove that, when it comes to the art that really gets us going, the artist could be anyone

20 Q Koko

Our favorite animal to go ape over sign language tells us what it's like to have hands on her feet and why her friend Michael is the gorilla of her dreams

BY **ROBERT CRANE** PHOTO BY **RON COHN**

Koko is the most celebrated gorilla in the world, and for good reason. She is the first gorilla that can use a human language. Dr. Penny Patterson has been her teacher since Koko's birth and is the director of The Gorilla Foundation in Woodside, California, where Koko now lives.

Robert Crane interviewed Koko, with Dr. Patterson acting as interpreter. He reports, "Koko, 15 years old and 230 pounds, sat poised and ready in her open-air living area. She looked me in the eye and, using American Sign Language, commanded, 'Show me your teeth,' which I respectfully did. She was delighted by the enormous amount of gold and silver in my mouth. Her mate, Michael, 13 and 350 pounds, who shares quarters with her, never looked me in the eye—something to do with the fact that I was a stranger and a male.

"Koko and Michael, who have an occasional spat, are, for the most part, nonaggressive. They are the subjects of an ongoing study by the foundation's research team. Both gorillas seem happy and, in Koko's case, willing to deal with media attention."

Q1: Who are smarter, gorillas or humans?
Koko Devil. Gorilla Koko love good.

Q2: What is the most fun to do?
Koko: Please eat. Please eat.

Q3: What makes you happy?
[*Slaps her chest.*] Gorilla Koko love good. Koko love good fake tooth. [*Fake tooth is Koko's sign for a gold dental cap or crown.*] Feel Devil know. Gorilla polite happy Koko.

Q4: Do you think Michael is cute?
Cute [*signed with two hands for emphasis equaling very cute*] sweet good.

Q5: What's better than bananas?
Koko: Corn.

Q6: What's the difference between boys and girls?
Corn there [*points toward floor*] good. [*Koko gets corn, because her floor is clean. Michael doesn't because his is dirty. The morning before the interview took place, Michael hadn't received a corn treat, because he had urinated on the floor. The gorillas are toilet trained.*] Girl people. [*Koko thinks of herself as a person and of Michael as an animal.*]

Q7: Which sex smells better?
Koko: Girl girl.

Q8: What do you want to be when you grow up?
Polite want good. Gorilla good.

Q9: What don't people understand?
Sorry good. [*When I say, I'm sorry and I'll be good.*] Frown look lip [*her sign for female*] pimple [*people*] fake tooth. [*They frown when I want to look at women's fake teeth.*] Gorilla don't know Koko love good. [*Gorillas and people don't know that Koko loves to be good.*]

Q10: What do you think of our language?
Fake lie good.

Q11: What's your most troublesome thought?
That. [*Points toward gold foil pattern on one of her scraps of fabric. Koko wants a gold tooth so badly that the night before, she had put a piece of gold braid into her mouth and swallowed it. Koko puts the gold foil against her first right upper molar, as if trying to make her tooth a gold one.*]

Q12: When is the kitten more trouble than it's worth?
Cat bad good. Frown eat there. [*Points to her cereal—referring to the fact that her cat has, on occasion, eaten it.*]

Q13: What's it like having hands on your feet?
Good there [*floor*] there [*mesh fence*]. [*They're good for use on the floor and on the fence.*]

Q14: What does it mean when you slap your chest?
Gorilla good. Drink hurry good drink me. [*Koko beats her chest to intimidate Penny, to get her to give her drinks, which have been restricted for a medical test.*]

Q15: What do you want for your birthday?
Earrings. Cookie.

Q16: What do you say when you really want to insult people?
Dirty Devil head.

Q17: How do you feel when you've eaten too much cake?
Sad bad stomach.

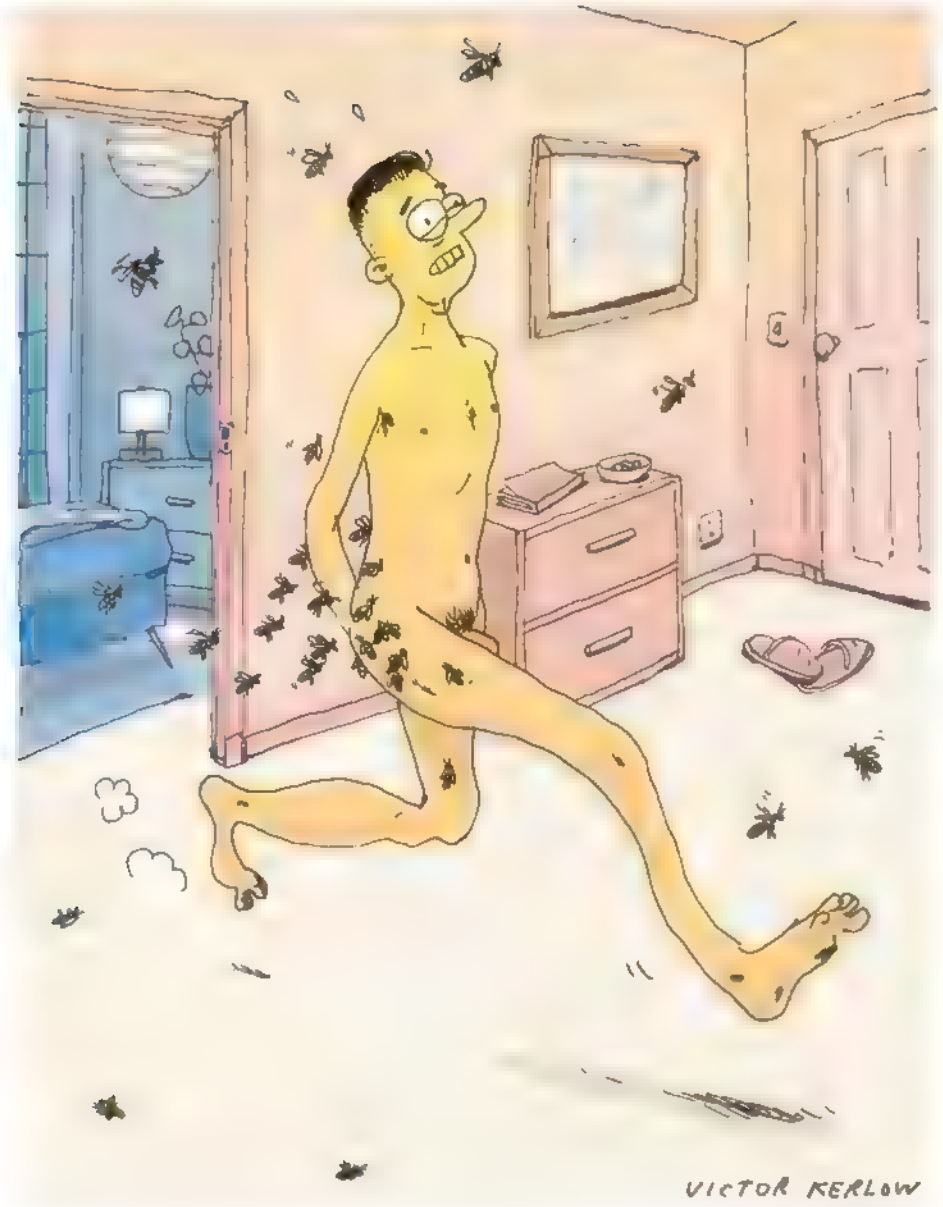
Q18: What would you eat for the sheer pleasure of it?
Champagne.

Q19: Is there anything else you want people to know about you?
Me gorilla gorilla me Koko good. . . finished.

Q20: What do you say when you're tired of being asked questions?
Gorilla teeth. Finished.

Playboy Cartoon *of the Week*

Cartoonist Victor Kerlow details a buzzy bedroom blunder



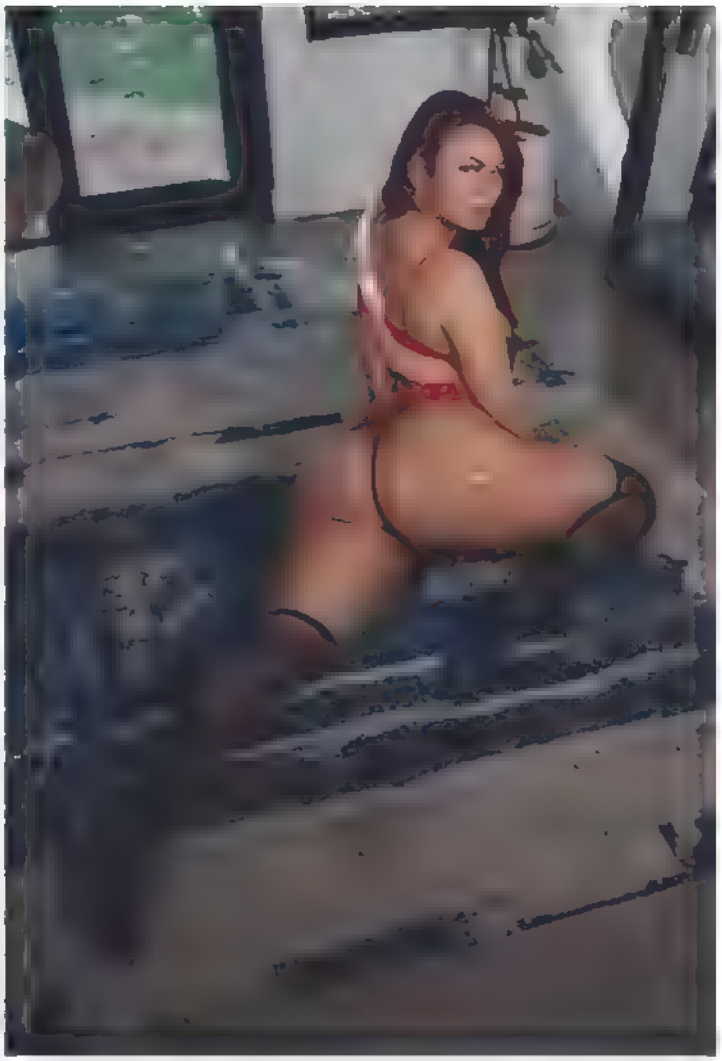
"I thought you said anal beads!"

Playboy Cartoon *of the Week*

Cartoonist Tom Toro reimagines a classic tale of romance

"Your kiss was well-aimed, Princess."

Natasha



We're happy to have you featured. Can you give us a bit of background on your career as a model and where it all started? Thank you :) It started back in 2020 I always had a passion for modeling before I even stepped in front of a camera I just always knew It was something that I had to do. I used to constantly watch modeling competitions on TV as a kid and I remember wishing that one day I was gonna be one of those working models

How do you usually begin your day? I always begin my day giving my fur babies some love Doja and Kai. We usually spend a good moment together just giving each other cuddles and kisses and then we get up and go on a walk to enjoy the fresh air before we start a busy day I usually always go to the gym after my walk with the dogs or I just get ready and beautify myself for a productive day.

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would it be and why? If I could spend the day doing anything I wanted I would definitely involve my paw babies, my mother, and some great food. I would head to the beach to work on my tan while my dogs played and ran around I would enjoy a day of relaxation accompanied by my best friend and my mother. I would also make sure to get some great food with the beach scenery. I would love to enjoy some fresh oysters and caviar after a day at the beach I would finish the day off with some shopping at my favorite stores I can spend any day and every day just that way

What are your favorite ways to unwind and relax when you're not working or traveling? I could definitely say I am a warm bubble bath champagne kind of girl I usually like to unwind with great eats accompanied by a cocktail or two (wink, wink). But if I'm Looking for some extra T_C I would typically book myself a massage and a facial some deep relaxation or preferably book a trip

Do you have any hidden talent, if so what is it? I wouldn't consider myself having a hidden talent exactly but I would consider myself a multi-talented young woman In such things as dancing, and also I'm a great cook, but if I had to pick a hidden talent I know it would be to have the ability to make light in any situation anyone definitely is going to be spending your time laughing around me. If I was to choose, I would say if I had a hidden talent, it would definitely be being a secret comedian

What's the best place you have ever been to in the world? So far the best place I've ever visited in the world was Fiji. It was so beautiful. The water was so blue, The food was so fresh and elegant, The culture was so intriguing to learn about Fiji was definitely one of the best places I've visited YET so far

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I would definitely say my biggest dreams are more intangible things in life such as being an inspiration to others, having a successful career, making a significant impact on society, be surrounded by loving friends and supportive people.

3 things that you can't go a day without. Giving kisses to my fur babies talking to my mother and I am obsessed with avocados so I'd have to say an avocado.

Looking back, what advice would you give to younger yourself? Don't rush to grow up, take your time, Follow your passion, and be who you are lastly invest in yourself because it will always benefit you in the long run but to worry less about the future.

That said, what advice would you give to all the women out there when it comes to love and relationships? Love is not what we see in the movies sadly but it could be just as great with the right communication skills and trust If I had to tell women out there one thing is boundaries Know your boundaries and adhere to them remember why you have them and always give yourself respect first in any and every situation

the most? Wel the most obvious is a person of integrity because to be a person with integrity is an overall a well rounded kind person but Personally speaking, I a
cause I feel pat

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The Dark, Hilarious and Brutally Honest

'Emotional Sci-Fi' of Writer A.M. Homes

The award-winning author talks dark humor and humanity and what it's like to revisit beloved characters

BY JULIE BUNTIN PHOTO BY PETER ASH LEE

Imagine the worst disaster that could strike your family. Now multiply that by five, and you're still barely in the ballpark of the chaos that Cheryl, the protagonist of A M Homes's She Got Away, stumbles into when she returns home from college after an ominous phone call from her anorexic sister, Abigail.

The story is set in Los Angeles, a world that at first seems familiar—casually expensive, the heat "like a physical lozenge, a sedative" but becomes, through Homes's rendering, disarming, hilarious and very weird. The details are all dialed up—think realism after a couple of Adderall. There's a kinetic energy generated by the relationship between tone (startlingly deadpan) and subject (grief, trauma, loss). Something has gone terribly wrong, and things are only going to get worse—and yet, from the dialogue to the details, what it really makes you want to do is laugh, the way horrible news can sometimes inspire hysterics. It's a bit sinister how Homes implicates her readers with their own laughter. What does it mean to laugh at tragedy? Why is it sometimes a relief to laugh at the things that scare us the most? Homes's writing, from her controversial novel The End of Alice, starring an imprisoned child molester, to her most recent novel, May We Be Forgiven, which opens with a man imagining his brother and sister-in-law having sex, regularly tackles the darker side of the human psyche. More boldly, she renders these situations with punchy, nerve-jangling humor. The effect is transgressive, exhilarating and, in a way, a relief. Everything sucks, people are capable of great cruelty and shocking selfishness. You might as well laugh.

Homes, the author of nearly a dozen books, writes fiction and nonfiction, essays and reportage. She has received several awards, including the 2013 Women's Prize for Fiction, and fellowships from the Guggenheim, the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Public Library's Cullman Center. (Not to mention, she was a runner-up in PLAYBOY's 1987 College Fiction Contest.) She has also taken her talents to the world of television as a writer-producer for the Showtime series The L Word and has developed pilots for several networks. We chatted via e-mail.

PLAYBOY: Where did your PLAYBOY story, She Got Away, come from? Are your stories motivated by a specific impulse?

HOMES: The only impulse that motivates me is trying to capture my characters wherever they are in their lives—as organically and honestly as possible. The hard work is knowing what lens to look through, what aspect I'm interested in capturing and why. Grace Paley, my wonderful teacher, taught me to always aim to capture the truth according to the character, which was good advice. For the most part I don't write autobiographically, so I am always focused on what is the experience of this situation, this moment for each of my characters.

This story and the characters in it are part of a series of stories I've written about the same family. The first was "Chunky in Heat," which appeared in The Safety of Objects, and then "Raft in Water Floating," which was in Things You Should Know, and then "Hello Everybody," published by Electric Literature and which, along with She Got Away, will be in my new collection, out next summer.

> *"Humor is very important. I find everyday life difficult, painful, and by finding the absurdity in it, I'm able to go a little further."*

PLAYBOY: Your writing is often concerned with, as you put it in a profile in The Guardian, the things people "don't want to say out loud." What are those things in She Got Away?

HOMES: It's been said that I write emotional science fiction—emotions pushed out to the next level. I think of it like a photograph that's supersaturated with color. And in terms of what's not said out loud, I'm interested in the space between our public and private selves, the subtle secrets we keep with regard to the dissonance between how we present ourselves and how we live. And often, I'm also writing about the dissonance within each of us, between who we are, who we aspire to be and how family history or

our fears can keep us from achieving our goals.

PLAYBOY: Some of the funniest moments in She Got Away come from the interaction between the bluntness of the tone and the magnificent tragedy of the events; Abigail's eating disorder, for example, is a source of several jokes in the piece (the foam restaurant, that she's literally two-dimensional). What drives you to write so irreverently about things that we generally find very serious? How conscious are you while writing of whether or not you're being funny?

HOMES: For me humor is very important. I find everyday life difficult, painful, and by finding the absurdity in it, the humor in it, I'm able to go a little further. Humor also allows us to talk about serious things. If you can make someone laugh, then you can also go down to the next level in terms of the psychological and the kinds of things that are difficult to talk about.

PLAYBOY: There's a great Donald Barthelme story,"The School," that reminded me a lot of She Got Away—both are organized around a kind of escalating pattern of deaths, each one more shocking and hilarious than the last. In plotting the story, did you see all these deaths coming? Did any of them surprise you?

HOMES: In terms of the deaths, it did surprise me. I've written about this family several times, and if you'd asked me years ago if this would happen, I'd have said no. But I'm also aware of how a family tragedy, such as the one this family went through years ago, takes its toll on everyone, the parents, the siblings. And I think for the main character, the larger question was about the safety of leaving home. What is lost when one grows up and leaves the nest? For Cheryl the literal question was: Would the nest survive? And if somehow the family didn't, would she?

PLAYBOY: I love how brazenly this piece challenges what the reader is willing to believe. Were you ever worried about pushing the reader too far?

HOMES: The core of the story is deeply honest and human, and the bells and whistles of their life in L.A. are just a reflection of the strangeness of the times we're living in—and their attempt to stay "real." Again, perhaps it goes back to that notion of emotional science fiction—which is perhaps illustrating the outside edges—or, as you say, pushing the reader a little bit. But if it's a push, it's a push into the heart of the story and the characters.

PLAYBOY: The story pokes fun at Los Angeles and some of its clichés: Abigail and her mother both have "all the filler and Botox"; one of Cheryl's dad's movie-star clients visits him in the hospital to make sure he's not just avoiding him; there's a pervasive gloss of money over the domestic details. What makes L.A. an interesting setting, and why did you choose to root the piece there?

HOMES: I've written several stories and novels set in Los Angeles. I find it a fascinating place, where the "dream" in the classic American Dream way is very much still alive. People come to L.A. to make it—immigrants, aspiring actors, writers—and people reinvent themselves there. That's just part of the social fabric. I also find the racial/economic divides very interesting, as much about L.A. is based on where you live—how far you're literally willing to go for work, for dinner, etc. A while ago, when I was writing a nonfiction book, I described L.A. as the most American place in America, and I think that holds true. The obsession with celebrity, with pop culture, with the lives of the rich and famous is still a major draw—and yet real people live there and grow up there, which to me is what's super strange.

PLAYBOY: The characters in She Got Away talk past each other, in jokes and code. They often seem to be engaged in entirely separate conversations that occasionally intersect in hilarious ways, yet your dialogue masterfully spurs on the plot. Is there a secret to writing good dialogue?

HOMES: There is no secret. My training comes from having started first as a playwright. Edward Albee was one of my mentors, and there were other "invisible" mentors such as Harold Pinter and Sam Shepard.

PLAYBOY: What crime do you think you would most likely get away with? Or, if the answer to that is too revealing, have you ever stolen anything? If so, what?

HOMES: I once stole blue eye shadow; my mother made me return it. You'll notice I don't wear makeup.

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